

The Reception of the Music of Gustav Holst
In Australia 1900 - 1950

by

Christopher Allen Alomes

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ABSTRACT

The contribution of Gustav Holst to the establishment of a distinctive British voice in the European compositional tradition has been historically undervalued and generally focused on just a handful of works, particularly his suite for orchestra, *The Planets*. Yet Holst's individual style and contribution in Britain and beyond must be re-evaluated to provide a fuller picture of British music and its influence in the first half of the twentieth century. Much of what was written about Holst in his own era reflected the concerns of British nationalism at the time and the prominence of other figures such as Ralph Vaughan Williams. Recent scholarship has been attempting to redress the balance and this research constitutes a contribution to the efforts to re-evaluate the contribution of Holst, the originality of his music and his legacy. The historiography surrounding Holst has been examined and analysed to establish the prevailing attitudes and opinions of his work in Britain in this period and how these were propagated. The thesis then compares the objective reception history of Holst's compositions in Britain and in the far-flung outpost of Australia. Such a comparison throws significant light on British influences on Australian musical culture in the first half of the twentieth century and identifies key figures and institutions in the transmission of British music to the Australian public and its reception. Many were long-standing friends and colleagues of Holst or had been involved in performances of his work in Britain.

This thesis explores the reception of the music of Gustav Holst by the generally conservative Australian musical public in the first half of the twentieth century and argues that the reception of Holst's music in Australia was resoundingly successful. Such was the praise that musicians, audiences, and critics alike heaped on his music that it is surprising that there were not more performances given. The Australian music scene has been shown through this

study of the reception of Holst to have been far more open to 'modern' music than was expected. In doing so it arrives at a new narrative that reassesses not only the influential contribution of the composer, providing evidential balance to the historically one-sided account, but also expounds the pivotal role played by champions in the Australian music scene in the broadening of musical taste. The research has also highlighted the difficulties faced by many contemporary British composers, not only in Australia, but also in their native England to have their music performed and for it to find a permanent place in the repertory.

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Preface

The aim of this research has been to make some modest inroads into understanding the way that the music of English composer Gustav Holst (1874-1934) was received and propagated by the Australian musical community of performers and patrons. Such research contributes to the broader body of knowledge about major influences on the development of Australian classical music and post-colonial cultural capital. The period under consideration is 1900-1950, chosen because it encapsulated Holst's entire creative life after leaving the Royal College of Music where he trained, and the consequent reception of his music for a period after his death. The springboard to enable an understanding of the Australian reception was an analysis of reviews and other media from the period.

While Gustav Holst was generally considered a major figure of British composition in the first half of the twentieth century, he was at the same time overshadowed by some of his peers who outlived him and produced a larger body of work, and the writing of British musical history has tended to underrate his significance. Seeking to explain this duality, current scholarship on Holst was examined starting from modern secondary sources and progressing through to the evidence contained in primary sources. While these will be previewed in the opening chapter, it will be useful to flag for the reader the unfolding context and one of the glaring contradictions when considering this important body of work.

This thesis has aimed to build a comprehensive picture of Holst's musical performances in Australia and the reception of these works by critics and the musical public. In order to

contextualise this information a profile of Holst's reception at home in Britain prepared from secondary sources is provided to serve as a comparison. This counterpoint will also serve the Australian picture that emerges, by providing direct links with what was happening with Holst's music in Britain during the given timeframe.¹

The historiographical portrait of Holst's reception on the musical scene in Australia was non-existent. The chosen pathway to detect the missing pieces was to first track down the critics' reviews of Australian performances of Holst works and use these eyewitness accounts from print media of the day as a starting point to carefully piece together the circumstances that coalesced to make these performances possible. With the additional research layers comprising private letters, public talks and the interesting recurrence of a mere handful of names as the catalyst for the appearance of Holst scores and subsequent interpretations, an unusual picture began to appear which contracted the prevalent view which persists in the literature of twentieth-century British music. The analysis of the collected evidence revealed Holst as the forgotten man of British musical history.

The research of other Holst scholars has been outlined in the following chapters, along with a brief review of seminal works and how they have contributed to what may be referred to as the "traditionally accepted view" of Gustav Holst – the starting point for exploring the forgotten man perspective. From this it has been argued that evident gaps ought to be addressed in order to provide a more comprehensive account than that which currently

¹ The British comparison contains a useful number of reviews and articles (primarily contained Chapter 3), however the majority of these accounts comprise reporting from the major London papers and journals. The vast majority of the public would have come across discussion of Holst's performances from critical reviews. This snapshot of British reviews while limited, will serve as a useful comparative study against the more comprehensive Australian picture. To seek out and analyze every review for all works by Holst performed in Britain during the timespan under investigation was well beyond the scope of this thesis.

exists. The processes used to gather new information will be highlighted and explained prior to dealing with each relevant section in the remainder of this work. The collected information provided an initial picture of Holst's reception in the Australian music scene and as a result has highlighted additional questions for future scholars.

There has been considerable disagreement among critics regarding the innovativeness and modernist tendencies and influence of Holst's compositional language. Perhaps best known for his orchestral suite *The Planets* - as well as his *St Paul's Suite* for strings, choral and orchestral work the *Hymn of Jesus*, and his opera *Savitri* - Holst's compositional language was infused with exoticism and folk influences, but more than that it was a distinctly *individual* language. Holst's idiomatic style could be heard in his works, and his great friend Ralph Vaughan Williams acknowledged this stating, "it is the blend of the visionary with the realist that gives Holst's music its distinctive character."² Critics and historians however, both in Holst's own time and today, continue to disagree on the importance of his work. By creating an account of Holst's performances in Australia and the reception of his works by the public, performers and critics alike, an argument is offered to counter how this truly original and creative English composer has been overlooked in most historical accounts of British music.

² Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Vaughan Williams on Music* ed. David Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 299. In his essay, 'A Note on Gustav Holst' Vaughan Williams links Holst and Beethoven together in "that they are both uncompromisingly direct in their utterance" (301).

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In order to contextualize Gustav Holst's musical reception in Australia, it is important to first discover how he was perceived at home in Britain as a baseline. Looking at the many newspaper and musical journal reviews and articles on performances of Holst's music in Australia can only give a part of the overall picture that is sought. Other factors have been important in gaining understanding about the reception of Holst's music, such as how audiences were predisposed to hearing this new music, and the esteem in which fellow musicians and critics held Holst. These factors can be determined by studying both Holst's reception in the British press, and in his standing in contemporary musical biographies and historical texts. Resources specific to Holst giving scholars a broad overview of other works are the most useful place to start.

Influential Secondary Sources to assist Holst Scholars

When considering the contemporary secondary sources to begin this investigation it is useful to look at the work of Mary Christison Huismann, Michael Short, and Jon. C. Mitchell. One of the newest entries to the Holst canon, and by far the most technically thorough is Mary Christison Huismann's *Gustav Holst – Research and Information Guide*.³ Published in 2011, this research guide contains a wealth of bibliographic and biographical information. Huismann's approach to the examination of Holst and his work has been particularly helpful to this thesis by way of the divisions conceived, highlighting sections

³ Mary Christison Huismann, *Gustav Holst - Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

such as ‘monographs and chapters’, ‘dissertations and theses’, and of particular usefulness, ‘reviews’. These reviews have been used as a starting point to create a picture of Holst’s reception among his British contemporaries. The vast majority of Huismann’s review references come from the British newspaper *The Times* and the journal *Monthly Musical Record*. These reviews are in essence what the current study is looking at through an Australian lens, but taking it a step further and analysing those voices (usually) representing a contemporary opinion of a work or composer. Huismann’s reviews not only contain the source, but also the date, paper number, and the title or headline of the article for easy location. Most references contain a short write-up describing the content in a small but helpful space. This format also shows what is contained in source materials such as correspondence, Holst’s own writings, diaries and collected editions. As complete and thorough as the British aspect covered in Huismann’s book, there were still reviews for some of Holst’s works found in this study that were not listed by Huismann. A greater search of digitized archives of those major London papers revealed more reviews and discussions, however not significantly more than listed by Huismann to indicate that a significant portion was missing. Apart from a reference to the Fritz Hart correspondence in the National Library of Australia it refers to no other materials from Australia. This research guide was an invaluable resource for the historiographical British study undertaken in Chapter 2 of this thesis.⁴

Huismann’s research guide also contains a collection of journal articles pertaining to Holst and his music. Most of the articles examine the specific aspects or analysis of particular pieces. Whilst the reception of particular works is determined through reviews and

⁴ Whilst the research guide is quite comprehensive, there were instances of some performance reviews being either missed or omitted, which were found in a separate search through digitized archives and in references from other resources.

accounts from contemporaries, journal articles on the influences and construction of those works can suggest the reasoning to the popularity or lack thereof about a work, as well as to show how Holst's music was discussed and analysed both in the first half of the twentieth century, and more recently.

Short's biography *Gustav Holst: the Man and his Music* provides a biographical view of the composer that benefits from collaboration with Imogen Holst, and contains a thorough reference section and discussions on Holst's musical idiom. Jon C. Mitchell's *A Comprehensive Biography of Composer Gustav Holst, with Correspondence and Diary Excerpts: Including His American Years* is a thorough biographical account accompanied by perhaps the next most comprehensive bibliographic collection of Holst materials in one book, complimenting the Huisman research guide.⁵ Mitchell examines Holst's activities in America as his main focus, but it is nonetheless a very interesting collection of resources, although there are pieces that are missing from his list, such as material from the Fritz Hart archive in the National Library of Australia. The current thesis is perhaps a more concentrated take on a very Australian version of Mitchell's American ideas.

Alan Gibbs and Paul Holmes give other accounts of Holst's life. Gibbs focussed on Holst's circle of friends and associates through festivals and other activities,⁶ and Holmes' account is a useful collection of information and letters that provide depth to the composer's trips and family life.⁷

⁵ Jon C. Mitchell, *A Comprehensive Biography of Composer Gustav Holst, with Correspondence and Diary Excerpts: Including His American Years*, (New York: E. Mellen Press, 2001).

⁶ Alan Gibbs. *Holst among Friends* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000).

⁷ Paul Homes, *Holst* (London: Omnibus Press, 1998).

The specialist articles of Raymond Head examine the exoticism of Holst's influences in three articles entitled *Holst and India (I-3)*.⁸ This exoticism is an area of interest for other scholars as well, with a chapter focussing on Holst and orientalism is also found in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire 1780s – 1940s*.⁹ The focus of this chapter is on the *Beni Mora* Suite and other Indian-influenced works such as the *Rig Veda* hymns and *Savitri*. Head has also reviewed much of the output of other people's publications on Holst,¹⁰ and explored other aspects of Holst's works from an analytical standpoint.¹¹ Richard Greene, too, has examined Holst from a more traditional perspective in articles, such as Holst's impact in the operatic genre.¹²

Theses and Academic Materials

Current academic scholarship on Holst clusters within the last fifteen years. Thomas Block's thesis, entitled *A Study in Selected Early Works by Gustav Holst* examines many of Holst's works prior to 1920, from a developmental standpoint of the journey from post-

⁸ Raymond Head, "The Hymn of Jesus: Holst's Gnostic Exploration of Time and Space," *Tempo Magazine*, no. 209 (1999): 7-13.

⁹ Martin Clayton, "Musical Renaissance and Its Margins in England and India, 1874 - 1914." In *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s - 1940s*, edited by Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 71-94.

¹⁰ Head's long time interest in Holst is documented on his personal website under the title "Gustav Holst Scholar" stating: "Raymond is a Gustav Holst scholar and a musical adviser to the Holst Birthplace Museum in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. He received a Holst Foundation Award 1984 to pursue original work on Holst and was a Trustee of the Holst Birthplace Museum from 2003 to 2006. On April 4, 2008, Raymond's *Fanfare for Gustav Holst* was played at the unveiling of Holst's Statue in Cheltenham." Head also Published a complete Urtext edition of Holst's *Wind Quintet* in 2006, and published a previously unpublished piano work – *A Piece for Yvonne* (1924) <http://raymondhead.com/biography> (accessed January 13, 2014).

¹¹ Raymond Head, "Holst - Astrology and Modernism in the Planets." *Tempo* 187 (1993): 15-22, and Raymond Head, "The Hymn of Jesus: Holst's Gnostic Exploration of Time and Space." *Tempo Magazine*, no. 209 (1999): 7-13.

¹² Richard Greene, "'As for Opera I Am Bewildered': Gustav Holst on the Fringe of European Opera," in *Art and Ideology in European Opera* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 122-48.

Wagnerian influence to his fully individual musical voice.¹³ Block highlights the lack of scholarship on these early works, stating that the little attention that has been given to Holst has almost entirely been focussed on the mature works. This early stylistic journey is explored in Christopher Scheer's doctoral thesis, *Fin-de-Siècle Britain: Imperialism and Wagner in the Music of Gustav Holst*.¹⁴ Scheer went on to contribute a chapter on Holst in the recent publication *British Music and Modernism 1895-1960*,¹⁵ in which he strongly conveys the message of the neglect of Holst's work in an historiographical context – a view that is mirrored in this thesis. An exploration of 'Socialist Music' focussing on Holst and Vaughan Williams is presented in the most recent thesis discovered, in which Ian Wallace examines the relationship the two composers had with William Morris and the influence such exposure may have had on their music.¹⁶ The influence of the Russian compositional school on British music around the turn of the twentieth century is examined by Gareth Thomas, in which Holst is one of many British composers' discussed.¹⁷

The remaining theses found are all related to analysis of specific works. They cover the ever-popular *The Planets*,¹⁸ the *Four Songs for Voice and Violin*,¹⁹ *Savitri*,²⁰ and his wind

¹³ Thomas Block, "A Study in Selected Early Works by Gustav Holst" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Gothenburg, 2000).

¹⁴ Christopher M. Scheer, "Fin-De-Siècle Britain: Imperialism and Wagner in the Music of Gustav Holst," (Doctoral Thesis, University of Michigan, 2007).

¹⁵ Christopher M. Scheer, "'A Direct and Intimate Realization': Holst and Formalism in the 1920's." In *British Music and Modernism 1895-1960*, edited by Matthew Riley, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 109-24.

¹⁶ Ian Wallace. "Socialist Music in Britain: The Influence of William Morris on Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams," (Master's Thesis, Penn State University, 2014).

¹⁷ Gareth James Thomas, "The Impact of Russian Music in England 1893-1929," (Doctoral Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2005).

¹⁸ Kanokrut Leelasiri, "An Analysis of Gustav Holst's 'the Planets'," (Masters Thesis, California State University, Northridge, 2001).

¹⁹ John Paul Rutland, "Violin and Voice as Partners in Three Early Twentieth-Century English Works for Voice and Violin," (Doctoral Thesis, University of North Texas, 2005).

²⁰ Joseph Earl Broughton, "The Waning of Victorian Imperialism: Stylistic Dualism in Gustav Holst's One-Act Opera *Savitri* (1908-9)," (Masters Thesis, University of North Texas, 2005).

band music.²¹ It is interesting to note, given the relative rarity of the name, that there are many more theses *by* Holsts' than *on* Holst. There are also specialist books on Holst's works such as *The Planets* by two respected Holst scholars.²²

Imogen Holst – The Important Accounts

If a biographer strives to gather intimate knowledge of their subject, then the several in-depth accounts that have been given by Gustav Holst's daughter Imogen Holst - herself a respected composer and conductor – must be considered important sources.²³ Her books *Gustav Holst*,²⁴ *The Music of Gustav Holst*,²⁵ and *Great Composers: Holst*,²⁶ give a special, more intimate insight in to Holst's life and works in a more narrative style than many other accounts.²⁷ These books are especially important due to a lack of material published on Holst's life – whilst there are several small biographical accounts given by a Holst's friends and students,²⁸ it is in no way comparable to biographical accounts of the more 'popular'

²¹ Samuel L. Sanchez, "The Intersection of English Folk Song and Wind Band Composition of Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Percy Grainger," (Masters Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2005).

²² Raymond Head, *Gustav Holst: The Planets Suite - New Light on a Famous Work* (Oxfordshire: Sky Dance Press, 2014), and Richard Greene, *Holst: The Planets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²³ This view is held due to the majority of books or studies on Holst almost exclusively leaning on Imogen's accounts of her father's life as the strongest evidence for that task.

²⁴ Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).

²⁵ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

²⁶ Imogen Holst, *Great Composers: Holst* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).

²⁷ Many of the theses mentioned earlier in this chapter, and indeed most other scholarly work from the second half of the twentieth century concerning Holst lean on Imogen Holst's accounts of her father in these books as a basis of understanding of his life and works. There is a red-flag raised by Byron Adams in an article which questions Imogen Holst's intentions in the reflection and discussion of her father in her accounts – postulating that her rough treatment in many instances reflected jealousy and bitterness in her own station as 'the daughter of the man who wrote the planets,' and not the musician in her own right she was. Byron Adams, "Gustav Holst: The Man and His Music by Michael Short," *The Musical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (1992): 581-94. An interesting take on Imogen Holst's accounts, but one which is disagreed with in this thesis.

²⁸ These are many essays and talks given by Vaughan Williams, and other musicians such as Bax (Clifford Bax, "Recollections of Gustav Holst." *Music & Letters* 20, no. 1 (1939): 1-6). Biographical and personal accounts continue such as Holst's student Edmund Rubbra, *Gustav Holst* (Monaco: Lyrebird Press, 1947), and his *Gustav Holst - Collected Essays* (London: Triad Press, 1974).

composers, such as Elgar, Delius or Vaughan Williams.²⁹ Imogen Holst's close relationship with her father, coupled with her musical expertise makes for a very valuable resource – one heavily relied upon by virtually all other sources that have discussed Holst from the composer's death onwards.³⁰

Primary Sources and Faded Ink

One of the most important resources for gaining the best possible understanding of how Holst's music was received in Australia are the newspaper reports and reviews that appeared in the press at the time of performances. The use of a feature on the Libraries Australia website for searching and viewing digitized newspaper files has been invaluable in gathering and collecting all the newspaper articles in every major Australian newspaper from before the turn of the twentieth century through to the nineteen-sixties.³¹ The digitizing and text reading of these newspapers takes the task of searching for such specific things like music reviews of a particular composer from 'needle in a haystack' impossible to (with consistent effort) relatively straightforward. The system does have some small flaws which affect the search function, such as the automatic text reader mistaking 'Holst' for 'Hoist' due to the faded 'L' registering as an 'I', but no system is perfect.³² Gathering all of the available newspaper reviews and articles on Holst and performances of his works was a laborious and painstaking task, yet it represents the most crucial evidence in gauging

²⁹ This grouping with Vaughan Williams is, as the reader will discover, exhaustingly monotonous in all aspects of the literature on British composers.

³⁰ Colles acknowledges the importance of Imogen Holst's writing on her father in the supplement to the 1940 4th Ed of Groves stated he was indebted to her "excellently written book" referring to the *Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938). H.C. Colles, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 4th Ed supplement, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1940), 284.

³¹ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper?q=%20>

³² Indeed, if the search for reviews and articles were left at the search for 'Holst,' the number of articles found would be a small fraction of the total.

popular and contemporary opinion. Along with an investigation of primary and secondary sources, this comprised the initial foundation stone of research completed for the thesis - setting the basic foundation for compiling a comprehensive picture of contemporary opinion of Holst and his music in Australia. Such a compilation of reviews and articles has already been gathered in the British context in Huismann's Holst research guide.³³

The work and activities of the British Music Society in Victoria and New South Wales have been examined, with Louise Hansen-Dyer prominent for her work in gathering and importing scores of then-contemporary British composers, and arranging for performances of these works to be given. Making the connection with attaining a score from England and its performance has been important in establishing a timeline and the processes by which Holst's music came to be performed in Australia. The *British Music Society Catalogue* is housed at the State Library of Victoria and was investigated for programs and material related to any Holst performances. All this relevant material was dealt with in a paper by Daniela Kaleva titled *Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer's Patronage of Gustav Holst*.³⁴ Kaleva comprehensively accounted for all the relevant British Music society material,³⁵ as well as all aspects of Holst's relationship with Hanson-Dyer (some of which is discussed in Jim Davidson's exploration of Hanson-Dyer in *Lyrebird Rising*).³⁶

The *Australian Music News* (1911-1963) proved ineffective in helping to gauge popular opinion about the reception of Holst's music. The *Index to Australian Music News*,

³³ Mary Christison Huismann, *Gustav Holst - Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

³⁴ Daniela Kaleva, "Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer's Patronage of Gustav Holst," *Context* 37 (2012): 77-91.

³⁵ Kaleva had also dealt with the materials in another article concerning Holst and the British Music Society - "The Gustav Holst and British Music Society of Victoria Collections at the State Library of Victoria," *Fontes Artis Musicae*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2008), 170-179.

³⁶ Jim Davidson, *Lyrebird Rising - Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre 1884 - 1962*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

compiled by Lina Marsi, indexes the articles in the *Australian Music News*, sorting them by the artist or ensemble they refer to.³⁷ Whilst there is no entry for Gustav Holst, there are many references to the ensembles, conductors and educators who were responsible for playing and promoting his music. Further research into all of these ensemble or artist entries has uncovered very few reviews of Holst's performances.³⁸ The information that makes this index viable is the digitized newspaper articles discussed above as they allow a database of these various artists to be extracted, and then referenced against the entries in the *Index to Australian Music News*. As Kay Dreyfus remarks in the preface to the *Index*, the journal was "...the only music journal of its kind published in Australia, the *Australian Musical News* is a unique chronicle of Australian musical life in the period 1911-1963... Published in Melbourne... it was nevertheless national in orientation as well as reporting on the activities of Australians abroad." Being the only journal reporting like this, any information or review uncovered on Holst from the *Australian Musical News*, as rare as they may be, is a required piece in the jigsaw to constructing a more complete final image.

The British parallel to the *Australian Musical News* was the publication *The Musical Times*. In the two volume series named *The Mirror of Music*,³⁹ an examination of "A Century of Musical Life in Britain as reflected in the pages of the *Musical Times*," is undertaken and was important to the historiographical study of contemporary opinion of Holst's music in Britain, as will any study on 'contemporary' British music of the early

³⁷ Lina Marsi, *Index to the Australian Musical News 1911-1963* (Melbourne: Lima Press, 1990).

³⁸ This index was frustrating for the current study, as the index presented the information in such a way as to be the most inefficient for locating and recovering the articles on microfiche. The work required to locate the articles concerning the ensembles and performers in question even within the same year as a recorded Holst performance very rarely produced a relevant review or article. The author actually ended up reviewing every edition in microfiche for decades searching for any relevant information on Holst with little success.

³⁹ P. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music Vol. 1* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947).

20th century.⁴⁰ Contextualizing Holst in the British musical landscape is the vital first step of understanding needed before attempting a study of contemporary Australian opinion and reception.

The “Holst Museum” in Britain sadly offered nothing useful when seeking insight into the composer’s reception to British and Australian audiences - the goal of the current study.

The British film-maker Tony Palmer described in an online post for *The Guardian* newspaper his experience when gathering materials for his in-depth documentary on Holst:

Holst was born in Cheltenham in 1874, and that was my next port of call. The Regency terraced house is now run as a "Victorian experience". It has his piano, some portraits, and a cot. Compared with the throbbing industry that is Britten's old house in Aldeburgh, it is pathetic. It peddles the familiar twaddle about folk songs and Gloucestershire and, of course, The Planets. There had to be more to it than this.⁴¹

The official line of “he wrote The Planets” seems to be the main legacy preserved at the composer’s former residence.⁴²

The Britten-Pears Foundation houses a “Holst Archive” containing three separate sections – Gustav Holst; Imogen Holst and Holst Foundation; and the G and I Holst Estate. Imogen

⁴⁰ Scholes, *Mirror of Music*, preface.

⁴¹ Tony Palmer, “The inner orbit of Gustav Holst,” <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/apr/21/gustav-holst-tony-palmer> (accessed online July 17, 2014).

⁴² The Holst Birthplace museum Chairman of Trustees Graham Lockwood and the Curator Laura Kinnear refute Palmer’s claims in *The Guardian* online, but mostly outline that the small amount of funding to explain the limitations and point out that “the museum offers a great deal to those with a general curiosity or a deeper quest for knowledge.” It still remains that the Holst Birthplace Museum contains little useful information to inform the current study, instead acting as a more general educational experience to introduce the public to the composer. “Modest Aims of Holst Museum,” <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/apr/28/gustav-holst-birthplace-museum-film>, accessed July 21, 2015).

Holst's own life and work was closely involved with Britten, and so her father's work is intertwined in the fabric of the Britten-Pears Foundation's collection. The Gustav Holst papers include music manuscripts, published music, various correspondence, engagement diaries, and some of the composer's notebooks, lecture notes and contracts.⁴³

The Historiographical Portrait and Today's Legacy

Looking back to books published from the late nineteenth century through to middle of the twentieth century and beyond the composer's death provide a snapshot of chronological opinion, allowing the historical mindset about Holst the composer to emerge. Surveying the literature regarding the British music from the beginning of the twentieth century can provide comparative snapshots to how Holst was received and perceived at various points through his career and life, and after. Placing Holst's contribution and reputation among British music and musicians of the day helps in the understanding of the frequency of the performance of his music both in Europe and Australia. While the coverage is contained to British history, if Holst have been seen as one of the most important British composers of his day, the assumption that 'performances of his music in a major colony in the Commonwealth would be frequent and even taken for granted', would be reasonable. This reality, however, is not what is seen from most of the in-depth accounts rendered by many important sources. Nicholas Temperley's *The Romantic Age 1800-1914*,⁴⁴ an instalment of the *Athlone History of Music in Britain* barely acknowledges Holst as a separate figure

⁴³ Britten-Pears Foundation, "Holst Archive" 1906-2007 (Aldeburgh).

⁴⁴ Nicholas Temperley, *The Romantic Age 1800-1914*, The Athlone History of Music in Britain, (London: The Athlone Press, 1981).

from a list of others at any point.⁴⁵ Trying to separate Holst from Vaughan Williams in *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940*,⁴⁶ for example, is a difficult task indeed. There is the rare account with a little more attention paid to Holst and his contribution, with both Percy Young's *A History of British Music*,⁴⁷ and *The English Musical Renaissance*,⁴⁸ assigning more credit and worth to Holst than other accounts, however the unrelenting message taken from the accounts is that Holst's name really was only whispered next to or after that of his close friend Ralph Vaughan Williams, as his music and contribution to British music in general is only ever tacked on to the end of many large and thorough accounts given of the latter.⁴⁹

The historiographical accounts given in the various musical encyclopaedias and musical biographies are relevant to this thesis in helping to establish the broader picture of Holst's place amongst British composers at different points in time. Taking the *Grove* article on Holst in 1927, for example, actually opened its entry on Holst with a statement which immediately makes the majority of the historiographical output on Holst (or more specifically the lack thereof) seem suspicious:

HOLST, Gustav Theodore (b. Cheltenham, Sept. 21, 1874), one of the most prominent composers in England of his generation.

⁴⁵ This is the story for most other similar historical accounts it that Holst's name will just be hidden in a list of other composers and referred to the same way; eg. "British composers include Bax, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, and Holst," or the ever more popular "this was seen in the music of Vaughan Williams, and his friend Holst." Whether hidden in a list, or tacked on after Vaughan William's name, it is a challenge to find specific coverage of Holst in this historiographical material.

⁴⁶ M Hughes and R Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

⁴⁷ Percy Marshall Young, *A History of British Music*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1967).

⁴⁸ Peter Pirie, *The English Musical Renaissance* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980).

⁴⁹ Vaughan Williams was continually Holst's greatest advocate during his life and after, as many of his essays and writings show, and Imogen Holst's biographical accounts

This article, written by Edwin Evans, is an example of a rare account that would label Holst in such a bold and positive light during his lifetime. The same article was repeated for the following edition after Holst's death.⁵⁰ This *Grove* entry should be kept at the forefront of the reader's mind – it reflects the prevailing opinions in the press about Holst and his music and raises an alarming question when examined alongside nearly all of the accounts of British musical history rendered in the 20th Century, which will be explored in Chapter 2.

The first stop for those seeking a current short overview of a composer's life is the popular *New Grove*. The current summation of Holst given by Colin Matthews here conveys the view that 'Holst was a little different' - an attitude that some contemporary critics took issue with:

His prominent position among 20th-century English composers owes a great deal to the immense popularity of his orchestral work *The Planets*. The only pieces to have achieved comparable success are on a much smaller scale, yet equally idiosyncratic. His wholly individual blend of Hindu philosophy and English folksong set him on a path far from the mainstream of European tradition, although his early works reveal a thorough grounding in conventional forms.⁵¹

While acknowledging that Holst now occupies a “prominent position among 20th-century English composers,” Matthews focused this appraisal on the popularity of *The Planets*,

⁵⁰ These being the Third Edition (1927) and the Fourth Edition (1940), both edited by H.C. Colles, who was extremely familiar with contemporary British music, and had reviewed much of Holst's output while music critic of *The Times* newspaper. An article by *Grove's* current Editor in Chief, Deane. L. Root, conducts an overview of the goings-on of editors and the processes since inception of *Grove's Dictionary* in 1878. Deane Root, “A History of Grove Music”, *Oxford Music Online*.

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/public/page/HistoryofGroveMusic> (accessed July 28, 2014).

⁵¹ Colin Matthews, "Holst, Gustav." *Grove's Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13252>, accessed May 3, 2014.

while outlining the influences that helped shaped Holst's 'wholly individual' compositional language.

The current thesis could be seen as developing from Hughes' *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music*.⁵² Hughes' focus on the reception of music in the press and by a contemporary public to piece together an account of works and their impact is the most effective way to gauge an accurate standing of the composer and his music. Hughes' account is viewed through the lens of the English press, and while brief on Holst's involvement, summarises the composer's music being basically written off as 'clever' and not much more in comparison to the 'real hero', Vaughan Williams. Certainly viewed as such it is clear to see how the broader history books have overlooked Holst. His startlingly original compositional language and sound has many of his contemporary sources listing him under 'progressive' and 'experimental' at the time of his performances in England.⁵³ The current thesis seeks to examine Holst's musical reception with the Australian public, both musical and general.

Friends and Champions

Investigating the relationships Holst had with prominent Australian musicians, and prominent British musicians that were based in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century uncovered the champions of his musical cause in the country. Looking at the

⁵² Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁵³ The opinion in *Hughes and Stradling (1993)* - among many other historical accounts - is confirmation of this thinking.

output of those who championed Holst's music in Australia is extremely important, as many gave accounts and recollections of what was happening in the music scene at the time, and in some cases, accounts of things like rehearsals and performances. W. Arundel Orchard's books *Music in Australia*,⁵⁴ and *The Distant View* provide this sort of information; with the latter containing a list of works he premiered with the New South Wales State Conservatorium Orchestra including Holst's music.⁵⁵ Having access to accounts of the performances of Holst's work by musicians present is invaluable as a resource in determining conditions of the performance and how not only the audiences, but also the musicians reacted to the new music. The insight provided, however, was not focussed enough on Holst's works to be helpful to the current study.

Holst's friend and staunchest ally, Ralph Vaughan Williams, provides a key counterpoint to Holst in this study. Not only are the two inexorably linked historiographically (particularly in the self-important area of the establishment of a British national music, and folk tradition), but it was Vaughan Williams who has ultimately cast the largest shadow over his admired colleague. Letters between the two are revealing of their friendship and music camaraderie,⁵⁶ and even though Vaughan Williams' name is today much more known to musicians generally, there was no greater champion of Holst's music in Britain during or after his life.

Other relationships, like that between Holst and Fritz Hart which spanned both Australia and Britain over many years are also important to place in context. Gathering the

⁵⁴ W. Arundel Orchard, *Music in Australia* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1952).

⁵⁵ W. Arundel Orchard, *The Distant View* (Sydney: The Currawong Publishing Company, 1943).

⁵⁶ Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, *Heirs and Rebels; Letters Written to Each Other and Occasional Writings on Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

correspondence between the two, currently located at the National Library of Australia clarifies the extent of ‘behind the scenes’ organisation of the process of ideas, planning and arranging of performances in Australia. Other notable collections that have been investigated include the *Harold Bauer Collection*, the *Papers and Music Scores of William Arundel Orchard* and the *Herbert Norman Howells Collection* – all of which contain correspondence with Holst. Other standout resources appear in the *Valley Lasker Collection*, containing many pieces of correspondence and papers relating to the works of Holst, and an aptly named catalogue or collection: *Gustav Holst: Programs and Related Material collected by the National Library of Australia* which contain various performance programs and printed ephemera. This material not only related to performances in Australia, but also to those of Australians abroad.⁵⁷

From this literature review it is seen that there has been inherited a traditional view of Holst from Britain, not as a ground-breaking composer in his own right with his own musical style that was to have an enthusiastic reception in Australia, but as an adjunct to others viewed as more important (Vaughan-Williams being the default). Piecing together the story over the following chapters, we can begin to offer a wider range of resources that allows Holst to step out of the shadows and appear as a more well-rounded figure known for important contributions to the music world that go beyond *The Planets* alone. We can also see his champions in Australia and the views of the audience to his extraordinary work.

⁵⁷ Much of this material was programs, newspaper clippings of reviews and the like. It did not provide insight more than the digitized newspaper search from *Trove* uncovered.

Chapter 2: Holst in Britain

To determine Gustav Holst's musical reception in Australia it is necessary to first understand how he was perceived at home in Britain. An investigation into the many newspaper and musical journal reviews and expositions on performances of Holst's music in Britain provides a good starting point to form the overall picture that is sought.¹ A discussion on the state of the Australian music scene during the period under review will be presented at the end of this chapter before moving ahead with the Australian study, presenting the reader with a brief overview of what was happening at the time.

If the historiographical portrait of Gustav Holst is accepted by considering one side of the story (historical texts alone), a rather flawed portrait is found of a composer who is remembered as something of a 'one-hit wonder.' By investigating the many books published during the scope of this study (1900-1950), comparative snapshots can be viewed and the then-contemporary British mindset concerning Holst the composer will surface. The focus in this chapter will be on the musical dictionaries and biographies of the day, as well as other published commentary on contemporary 'modern' music of the time, and general histories and accounts of English and British music and its development. Analysing these accounts alongside the performance reviews in the major publications in Britain will serve to highlight the weaknesses and limitations inherent in relying on a somewhat myopic view. It will also clearly show how, by considering a range of other accounts, an explanation of what Herbert Howells described as "the

¹ How Australian audiences were predisposed to hearing this new music, whether they even recognised the composer's name, and where fellow musicians and critics ranked Holst on the sliding scale of compositional elite all need to be considered. These factors can be determined by studying both Holst's reception in the British press, and in his standing in musical biographies and contemporary sources.

rehabilitation of Gustav Holst as a major figure in twentieth-century British music” can emerge.²

Before considering the accounts of Holst rendered in historical texts and monographs, an exploration of performance reviews and general articles on the composer in the major newspapers and musical journals will be undertaken. The opinions of the critics between 1900-1950 prove vital in building an accurate understanding of Holst’s historical portrait, as they would also often author articles for the historical monographs that have become the basis for retrospective scholarship on the development of a British ‘national music’ tradition.

Holst in the British Press

The contemporary historiographical accounts given in various history books are an important tool to help establish the contemporary opinions of a composer, but it is the performance reviews and analytical articles around the first and subsequent performances that produce the clearest picture of the composer and his work at that moment in time. Often the reviews are from experienced critics well steeped in the contemporary music scene; the most capable of reflecting the atmosphere and reception from the wider public toward the new works. The context regarding what has come before as well as what is going on around the piece also helps to tell the story of the impact of the work. Being ‘on the scene’ as these critics were, their discussions of the

² Imogen Holst, *A Life in Music* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 322.

performances of contemporary works take place within a context of all other contemporary composers and works performed in the same area, around the same time.

It needs to be noted here that although the British newspaper and periodical reviews below encompasses all the material covered in Huismann's recently published research guide,³ there have been various works where more material has been unearthed in *The Times*, *The Musical Times*, and other publications. Greene's comprehensive collection of reviews and discussions surrounding the first four public performances of *The Planets* – fifty-four in all from the common major sources, but also including many local and less significant newspapers and community announcements – shows that there is obviously much information still buried in the large unsorted stack of media in the first half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the representative sample provided below should be considered as an indicative reflection of the reception of Holst's works and reputation in the first half of the twentieth century.

Before delving into the British reviews of Holst's music, an overview of the key players in the major sources discussed below is crucial in assessing the tone and approach to Holst's works, and can help explain potential biases – both positive and negative. The London newspaper *The Times* is the most prominently featured source of music reviews studied. Henry Cope Colles (H.C. Colles) took over as chief music critic in 1911 from J.A. Fuller Maitland, and held the position until his death in March 1943, which covered the key period of Holst's rise to prominence in the early 1920s until the composer's death and beyond.⁴ Colles studied with Parry at the Royal College of Music just before

³ Mary Christison Huismann, *Gustav Holst - a Research and Information Guide*, (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁴ Eric Blom and Malcolm Turner, "Colles, H.C.," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06118> (accessed August 8, 2014).

the turn of the twentieth century before receiving an organ scholarship at Worcester College, Oxford. He became the assistant music critic at *The Times* in 1905 as well as critic for *The Academy*. He socialized in similar circles to Holst, and was noted to have a special interest in the Three Choirs Festival – a Festival that Holst took an active interest in and which saw the premiere of his *Choral Fantasia*. Colles contributed heavily to the third and fourth editions of *Grove's Dictionary*, as well as to the seventh volume of the *Oxford History of Music*. For this reason, he must be considered one of the most prominent musical commentators of the first half of the twentieth century. On his staff at *The Times* from 1925 was Frank Howes (who would succeed Colles as chief critic in 1943). Howes was also chairman of the English Folk Dance and Song Society from 1938-1945 as well as the editor of the society's journal between 1927-1946.⁵ Colles's counterpart at the *Musical Times* was Harvey Grace, who similarly enjoyed an extended reign as editor of the periodical, between 1918 and 1944. His reviews were given under the pseudonym "Feste" and were noted as distinguishable "by their common sense and humour."⁶ Alfred Kalisch contributed reviews and articles on Holst to *The Musical Times* around the 1920s, but was mainly known as a champion of Richard Strauss's music in Britain.⁷ This group of men were moving in the same social circles, and most had similar backgrounds at the Royal College of Music and Oxford and Cambridge Universities, where they attended roughly at the same time.⁸

⁵ "Howes, Frank," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e5045> (accessed September 6, 2014).

⁶ H.C. Colles and Frank Howes, "Grace, Harvey," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/11565> (accessed September 6, 2014).

⁷ Arthur Jacobs, "Kalisch, Alfred," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006365> (accessed September 6, 2014).

⁸ Given the significant contributions to the major publications this group represented, it is no surprise to find many authored entries on one another in the various reference works such as *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, as well as many of the contemporary British musicians of the time.

The following overview of many of the major works by Holst aims at capturing the contemporary mindset of Holst's countrymen, as well as providing a reference point to works discussed in later chapters. There is a potential 'book or thesis-worth of material' in this British reception and analysis of Holst's works, so this overview of material from *The Times*, *Music & Letters*, *The Musical Times* and others should be taken as representative sample. This will serve as a comparison with the comprehensive study of the Australian musical reception, which is the focus of this thesis. These works will be discussed in alphabetical order, providing an ease of reference that would be impossible if constructing a chronologically ordered performance history.⁹ The reviews for each individual work, however, will be discussed chronologically.

At the Boar's Head

In April 1925, a review in *The Times* immediately portrayed Holst's warm welcome into the genre of British Opera, reflecting on the impact of Holst's previous foray into the much-loved genre stating that "since the success of *The Perfect Fool*, a new opera by Holst, even if only a little one, is a matter of considerable importance."¹⁰ The critic made an important observation about the success of this first performance stating "Its importance, however, is not to be judged by the clock, any more than its ultimate success can be judged by the applause of an enthusiastic first-night audience." Despite this insight regarding the ultimate success of a work being judged on its initial reception, he nevertheless noted:

⁹ The Australian performance reception in this thesis is grouped by work, each chapter focusing on one or several key works. The decision to group the works alphabetically instead of chronologically here, then, makes more sense as a reference point for the Australian chapters.

¹⁰ "At the Boar's Head – Mr. Holst's New Work," *The Times*, April 4, 1925, 10.

It may be said at once, however, that the reception given to the work and its composer was all that could be wished. Every seat in the house seemed to be occupied, the performance was punctuated by continuous laughter, and the applause at the end was wholehearted.

This review is clearly extremely favourable toward British opera, and Holst's efforts in helping establish an English voice in that genre. Whilst acclaim was given throughout, there are references to Holst having "indulged in ingenuity" and that "it is largely in his part [Prince Hal] that the passages occur where the music seems ill fitted to the lines."

This analysis is not backed up with specific examples citing how such opinions were formed.¹¹ Overall, however, the review praised both Holst's skill as a composer as well as welcoming *At the Boar's Head* as an important addition to the British operatic canon. Support for the comments made regarding the musical content of the previous review was rendered several months after the review, with an analysis of the vocal score in *Music & Letters*:

He [Holst] has been remarkably successful in, first, selecting a suitable tune and second, in contriving to fit the words so that the accentuation is faultless... and although the accents are not misplaced, there is a natural rise and fall in its spirit which this musical setting consistently fails to bring out."¹²

¹¹ Imogen Holst gave a different opinion regarding the musical interaction with the text, stating in *The Music of Gustav Holst* (pg 86-87) that "each syllable of the text is dealt with faithfully, and there are seldom any signs of strain in the writing... there are moments of obvious parody, when he lays on the harmonies with deliberate recklessness, but elsewhere he manages to draw every detail of atmosphere and characterization... and he misses none of the opportunities Shakespeare has given him."

¹² N.G., "Music Reviews," *Music & Letters* 6, no. 4 (October 1925): 379-380.

It is to be noted that Imogen Holst's account of the reception of the work is quite different (while noting that she is speaking generally, not relating to this particular review or performance) "the next work he wrote [*At the Boar's Head*] was condemned by nearly everyone who heard it. *At the Boar's Head* is a brilliant failure."¹³ These reviews could never be described as condemning, and Imogen Holst's account correspondingly appears a little harsh.

Choral Fantasia

A scathing review of the *Choral Fantasia* saw the work written off as a 'novelty' at the premiere performance at Gloucester cathedral.¹⁴ Holst himself conducted what was described as "an example of that curious workmanship characteristic of Holst in which strength rather than beauty is the conscious aim." The review continued:

This scoring seems to us an unfortunate piece of Holst's harmonic logic, possible on the orchestra, but well-nigh intolerable when applied to the fixed intonation of the organ... We had the vocal score to assure us that Mr Pritchard was not playing wrong pedals, and no one would accuse so able an organist of so elementary a fault: but we could have wished that he had been guilty, for the right notes were hideous...¹⁵

¹³ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 86.

¹⁴ "Three Choirs Festival – An English Choral Fantasia," *The Times*, September 9, 1931, 10.

¹⁵ This is a reference to the opening of the work, where the organ sits on a sustained second-inversion G over a pedal C#.

The only saving grace for the work, it seems, is that it was “typically English.”¹⁶ One cannot help but recall the mood captured by the reviewer Robin Legge – It might not have been good, but at least Holst wrote music “that is genuine all the way through.”¹⁷ In this instance, Holst was writing ‘English’ music to ‘English’ poetry; even if it was not enjoyable to listen to he was at least cooking with the right ingredients.¹⁸

Choral Symphony

Holst’s *Choral Symphony* provides an excellent study of the widely swinging opinions of his works over time, with seven reviews spread out between the 1920s and the 1960s. An incredibly detailed analysis of the *Choral Symphony* was provided in advance of the premiere totalling five pages in *The Musical Times*, representing a significant level of coverage.¹⁹ Harvey Grace provided an in-depth analysis citing many examples from the score, and an insightful conclusion about Holst the composer against the backdrop of ‘new’ music:

There is no composer to-day with a surer instinct and knowledge of what ‘comes off.’ However widely opinions may differ as to the actual success of his dashes into opera, orchestral suite, and choralism, nobody can deny their brilliance, nor the attractiveness that lies in their strange – even baffling – mixture of the hazardous and the calculated. Baffling, because the more we see of the Holst of the past few years, the harder it becomes to distinguish between the hazard and the

¹⁶ The critic explained “the Choral Fantasia adds another to the long series of typically English works brought forward by the Three Choirs; that is to say, works which derive their quality from their composers’ determination to secure a worthy setting from the fine flow of English poetry.”

¹⁷ Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 63.

¹⁸ As opposed to his “Biakra dancing-girls in Langham-Place, however clever their representation.”

¹⁹ Harvey Grace, “Holst’s Choral Symphony,” *The Musical Times* 66, no. 992 (October 1, 1925), 892-896.

calculation. Perhaps, after all, there is no hazard. It is reasonable to suppose that a composer with Holst's uncanny instinct for effect may do apparently daring things without 'chancing his arm.' We may expect the Leeds Choir to prove this to be the case with the Symphony. If so, the 'First' on the title-page will excite lively anticipations.²⁰

Grace, then, objectively noted that Holst's compositional language blends 'hazardous' harmony with calculation. The line "perhaps, after all, there is no hazard," shows his (almost uniquely) open mind to what Holst was consistently trying to achieve in his communication of musical ideas – something that cannot be said about other critics of the day, if their comments in reviews are to be taken literally. The first performance was given under Albert Coates at the Leeds Music Festival on October 7, 1925, and reviewed in *The Times* the following day.²¹ The reviews of the musicians were complimentary and, describing the success of all aspects of the work and performance the review noted: "the work and the composer were cordially, though not passionately, received by the audience. Probably it was not realized by all present what a tremendous achievement this first performance represented."²² Holst and his music seemed to remain on the outer edge of English music, even though it was noted, "Holst's technical method is now fairly familiar." People now knew what to expect from the composer that, in the past, had shocked them with his 'hazardous' harmony. A little over a week later in the

²⁰ Harvey Grace, "Holst's Choral Symphony," 895.

²¹ "Leeds Musical Festival – Fine First Performance," *The Times*, October 8, 1925, 12.

²² Colles in the 1940 *Grove's* 4th Ed Supplement would expand on the difficulty and the acclaim due to all involved in the performance stating "Certain it is that this choral symphony set the Leeds Festival a baffling task. The Scherzo, which takes only five and a half minutes to play, at first seemed to be beyond the powers of this highly accomplished choir. But Albert Coates came to the rescue...he obtained a triumph for the work, the composer, and all concerned in the first performance. The Leeds choir was brought to London to repeat Holst's choral symphony at a concert at the Royal Philharmonic Society on Oct. 29. But there the triumph was not so unequivocal." H.C. Colles, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 4th Ed supplement, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1940), 283.

‘entertainments’ section of *The Times* there was discussion about the Leeds’ premiere of the *Choral Symphony* and Vaughan Williams’ *Flos Campi* given at Queen’s Hall, with the Holst *Choral Symphony* to be performed again on October 29 by the Royal Philharmonic Society (again under Albert Coates with Dorothy Silk).²³ The article pitted Holst against Vaughan Williams, and although a good account is given of both, Vaughan Williams is the clear ‘winner.’ This is shown with passages such as “the initiative which Holst takes on so readily on his own shoulders Vaughan Williams asks his listeners to supply, and the more effort we make in that direction the more we are rewarded by becoming participants in his vision,” and continued:

We may point to certain lines of the Keats (*Choral Symphony*) to whose feelings and form the musician has manifestly done less than justice... and criticize a passage which is obviously a legitimate development of musical ideas for its lack of verbal plasticity... Vaughan Williams has denied himself the benefit and also safeguarded himself from the drawbacks of such appraisalment.”

This appraisal can be taken as ‘Holst took a risk and paid for it,’ while praising Vaughan Williams for not putting himself in that position in the first place. Even still, this article - part review, part preview - certainly extolled the virtues of both Holst’s style and the *Choral Symphony* alike.

The subsequent performance of the *Choral Symphony* on 29 October was reviewed in *The Times* of the following day, and reads very much the same as the initial review. The hall and acoustics were said to be better but the performance was received similarly.

²³ “Two Choral Composers – Holst and Vaughan Williams,” *The Times*, October 17, 1925, 10.

Once more, the reception was good but muted, with the same critic as the premiere (assumed with the statement “in many respects it sounded a great deal better than at the first hearing”).²⁴ It was noted that “the composer was called to the platform to share in applause which was heartily appreciative without being overwhelming,” qualifying this comment with the observation that this was “an audience of musicians who like to talk things over in the interval rather than to shout themselves hoarse at the end of a new work.” This performance, being a part of a choral festival, was more likely to attract the audience of musicians (and as such the more tame, considered reaction described by the audience). That the appreciation was more muted than an ‘overwhelming’ response doesn’t necessarily mean that response from those present was not as pronounced as a non-specialist audience.

An article covering the Leeds Festival discussed Holst’s *Choral Symphony* in *The Musical Times*.²⁵ It explained:

Modern Music is like that – it tempers our warmest liking with the knowledge that the composer’s mental effort is less acute than it used to be in the old days, even if the listener’s is more so. With this in reservation, which is not meant to be damning, Holst’s Symphony is a great work... Even to the close student of Holst it brings discovery. The familiar idiom, handwriting, call it what you will, is still shaping. The more practised he is in the use of it, the more simple and exact it becomes.

²⁴ “Philharmonic Society – Holst’s Choral Symphony,” *The Times*, October 30, 1925, 10.

²⁵ W. McNaught, “The Leeds Festival,” *The Musical Times* 66, no. 993 (November 1, 1925), 1006-1008.

Even with this introductory qualification for modern music, the critic labelled the *Choral Symphony* as a “great work.” His elaboration on Holst’s continually developing style acknowledged the composer’s individual voice. The article continues to discuss each movement individually, but relayed the great quality of the work.

The following month, Harvey Grace (under the pseudonym ‘Feste’) expounded on the choral singing at the Leeds Festival, and related it to the impact it may have had on Holst’s reception for his *Choral Symphony*.²⁶ He begins in an apologetic tone for his following bluntness - “It is a lonely and unpopular job, and will no doubt bring me a shower of half-bricks and accusations of partisanship and cantankerousness; but no matter.” His went on to batter the choristers, describing in detail how they were well below their expected standard, and justified it with the following:

But if the eulogies that greeted the singing in the Holst work at Leeds were well founded (as they seem to have been), I am disposed to believe those who say that the London performance showed a marked falling-off: for the singing at Queen’s Hall, judged by the standard mentioned above, was far from good... It is only fair to Holst that those who were disappointed with his ‘Choral’ Symphony at Queen’s Hall should realise that the performance did the work a good deal less than justice.²⁷

Grace explained that the choir had arrived in London on the afternoon of the Queen’s Hall performance and rehearsed Beethoven but not the Holst, and that perhaps there was reliance on the comfort with the piece that should not have been relied upon. He

²⁶ Feste, “Ad Libitum,” *The Musical Times* 66, no. 994 (December 1, 1925), 1086-1089.

²⁷ Feste, “Ad Libitum,” 1087.

reflected, “This is not the way to ensure a first-rate performance of a new and exacting work.” The whole tone is in clear defence of Holst’s work, and indeed a cry for more care to be taken with the presentation of new works to the public.

The conclusion can be drawn then that the initial two performances and reviews registered a great success for Holst. There were, as could always be expected, drawbacks pointed out that would stem from any new work, but the *Choral Symphony* certainly made its mark immediately on the musical map. The following decades, however, reveal the ambivalent attitude towards Holst’s music. The next performance was given over eight years later on April 11, 1934, and the review published the following day was scathing to say the least. The review stated “time has not dealt altogether kindly with this work, admirable though it is... the slow movement has come to sound too much like a cliché, though it is certainly a cliché of the composer’s own invention.”²⁸ This was to say that Holst was at least distinctive in this critic’s assessment.

A letter to the editor of *The Musical Times* by Stanley Oliver, a conductor with the Royal Wellington Choral Union in New Zealand, revealed the dichotomy of opinion on Holst’s music with audiences, the press, and the musicians:

It may interest some readers of the *Musical Times* to know that the ‘Schola Cantorum’ of Wellington, New Zealand, has publicly performed ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ (from First Choral Symphony) five times during the last three years. Comments on the work from members of the audience range from ‘utterly

²⁸ “The B.B.C Orchestra – Holst’s Choral Symphony,” *The Times*, April 12, 1934, 10.

incomprehensible' to 'I cannot conceive of music more beautiful.' Or remarks such as these from the press: '...appeals to the intellect rather than the emotions, suggesting less the imagery of Keats than the mysticism of Holst'; this from another: 'One's impression, much as one enjoyed the work, is that it would need a Delius rather than a Holst to fathom such beauty as that which Keats could sense.' This latter comment puzzled the choir (twenty-six carefully chosen singers) immensely, for they almost unanimously consider 'Grecian Urn' to be the most beautiful and most moving work in their fairly extensive repertoire of moderns. Later in the season we shall do 'Choral Fantasia.' Then what? ²⁹

This letter relays a microcosm of opinion on Holst's music – there are some that love it, some that hate it, and some that think they would prefer a different British composer to have written it. At least in this example, the press in New Zealand chose Delius over Vaughan Williams for their example, a welcome relief to the usually inseparable comparison used.

In the 1940 additional supplement to the fourth edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*,³⁰ Colles noted a comparison to Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*, suggesting that "Vaughan Williams's work has the advantage over Holst's that his selections from Whitman are made cohesive by a central theme, the sea; Holst's unity of purpose is at the mercy of Keat's elusive Spirit."³¹

²⁹ Stanley Oliver, "Holst's Later Works," *The Musical Times* 80, no. 1154 (April 1939), 293.

³⁰ H.C. Colles, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 4th Ed Supplement, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1940), 282-284.

³¹ Colles, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's* (1940), 283.

The *Choral Symphony* was not to be heard again until after the war in 1947, with a *Times* review headed “Rare Revival of Holst’s Choral Symphony”. The performance was conducted by Malcolm Sargent at the Royal Albert Hall to great acclaim. The review pointed out:

This is only the fourth performance it [the *Choral Symphony*] has had in the 20-odd years of its existence and the only one in which its immense difficulties were sufficiently mastered to reveal not only the extraordinary originality but the real power of the work, which on previous occasions has failed to convey to its audiences its unique beauty.³²

The recurrence of the issue of difficulty is seen in this review with another specific comment being made as to the mastery of the difficulties the work presented in its initial two performances. With sentiments like: “Holst alone of composers knew how to write music of silence and immobility,” the review captures the idiosyncratic voice of Holst’s originality. Almost a decade later the London Philharmonic performed the *Choral Symphony* under Sir Adrian Boult on June 24, 1955, with another harsh review of the music appearing the following day.³³ Its opening paragraph summarized well the pendulum of opinion on Holst and therefore is quoted in its entirety:

The London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, under Sir Adrian Boult, were brave enough to devote the second half of their concert at the Festival Hall last night to Holst’s *Choral Symphony*, brave in view of the angular leaps and tricky rhythms that confront the singers, and brave for undertaking a work of little or no

³² “Royal Albert Hall – Rare Revival of Holst’s Choral Symphony,” *The Times*, May 12, 1947, 7.

³³ “Choir’s Brave Undertaking – Holst’s Choral Symphony,” *The Times*, June 25, 1955, 8.

box office appeal. It lacks the sustained, mystical inspiration of *The Hymn of Jesus*, and lacks, too, the rapture of the poet from whom the words of all four movements are drawn, Keats.

Whilst the *Choral Symphony* had always been renowned for its difficulty, this had never been the main focus of any critical assessment. To state that the work has “little or no box office appeal”, while quite a sweeping statement in a review, actually highlights the paradox of Holst and his music. The opinion was so divided, that definitive statements either way were inevitable, and still are today. There is little here that is celebrated by the critic, vastly differing from the previous review. Including one last performance review, albeit stretching into the 1960s, serves to illustrate once more the vastly differing opinions surround Holst’s music. The review details how “on the whole the evening left one in regret at the neglect of this symphony. Since its premiere in Leeds in 1925 it has lived rather under a cloud.”³⁴ Sir Malcolm Sargent conducted and the performance was commended, but the praise of Holst’s compositional style, while tempered with a slight criticism that “Holst sometimes verges on the mundane and where the words lead to short sections at different speeds a sense of musical cohesion and progress is lost,” was otherwise positive. In the moment of the musical change of mood when Apollo is called upon the review stated that “the music is transformed rhythmically and purged of harmonic platitudes, leading in a calm unfolding to the quiet end... the Scherzo is pure wizardry... the fugue in the Prelude is a gem of unobtrusive skill.”

³⁴ “Holst Does Not Receive Full Justice,” *The Times*, January 23, 1964, 8.

The fundamental story of these reviews spanning many decades mirrors the common story with Holst on the broader spectrum of his works – either passionate praise of startling originality and skill, or an almost malicious writing-off of something that differs from the common expectation.

Double Concerto

A review in *The Times* discussed the second performance of Holst's Double Concerto and a *Serenade* by Arthur Bliss.³⁵ Not only does the review centre on the works, but also the style of both composers, probing the idiosyncratic approach of Holst. Opinions like: "He [Holst] says precisely what he means, never adds a line to his score whose effect is not exactly calculated, and into all his rhythmic vagaries carries a most direct purpose" sums up the common views towards Holst the composer – individual, calculating, deliberate. Of the *Double Concerto* the review adds that it "is original in design, individual in idiom, characteristic in style, in that the barest lines of counterpoint lead straight up to the most exciting climaxes." The concert was one of British music alone, featuring Walton and Elgar alongside Bliss and Holst.

Egdon Heath

³⁵ "Promenade Concert – Works by Bliss and Holst," *The Times*, September 19, 1930, 8.

Holst's *Egdon Heath* is widely considered among his best works by commentators and critics alike. Colles expounded on the work in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*:

One work in Holst's later output stands apart from the rest. It is a short orchestral piece called *Egdon Heath*, the score of which bears a quotation from Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*... Actually Holst's piece seems to have added the word 'stark' to the critical vocabulary, and that is a quality which the ordinary concert-goer does not greatly appreciate. 'Egdon Heath' was tolerated in England because it was by Holst and, recalled Hardy' it was 'hissed vociferously' in Paris when Monteux had the hardihood to play it at the Salle Pleyel on a Sunday afternoon. It should, however, be borne in mind that Holst did not write 'Egdon Heath' to illustrate his quotation from Hardy. He had tramped every inch of the ground; what he wished to say in his music was what he had experienced there. London and Paris could scarcely be expected to share his mood.... Holst believed that the 'First Choral Symphony' and 'Egdon Heath' were his two best works; he was particularly certain of the latter.³⁶

One week after the premiere of *Egdon Heath* in New York, it was performed in Holst's hometown of Cheltenham on February 13, 1928. It was described as "a very bare piece of writing, sombre in colour, with very little animation, full of grinding dissonances, not defiant, but uncompromising. It makes no concessions to the ear and no attempts to be attractive, but it grips."³⁷ It seems no wonder that Holst's music had such a difficult time being accepted by the wider public in the early twentieth century with Holst's

³⁶ Colles, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's* (1940), 283.

³⁷ "Egdon Heath – Holst's New Work at Cheltenham," *The Times*, February 14, 1928, 12.

language consistently described as ‘uncompromising’, but as this reviewer pointed out, “it grips.” The thoughtful review actually supports Holst, examining why his music seemed to be rejected at face value for his harmonic language if nothing else. The critic described *Egdon Heath* as “every note of it is authentic Holst, who has now achieved a personal style that is unmistakable,” and continued with praising specifics of his harmonic and rhythmic language, concluding “*Egdon Heath* is not likely to be popular, but says what the composer wants to say, whether we like it or not, and truth is one aspect of duty.”

Egdon Heath was given its third performance a little over a week later in London with a depleted Royal Philharmonic Society Orchestra at Queen’s Hall. The review the following day stated that the performance did not do the conductor or composer justice, explaining that the London Symphony Orchestra were on tour and thus many of the leading members of the Royal Philharmonic Society Orchestra were gone with it.³⁸ Also unfortunate in the reviewer’s eyes was *Egdon Heath*’s place in the program, stating: “The uncompromising style of Holst’s *Egdon Heath* was emphasized by its place between Berlioz’s hilarious *Carnival Romain* overture and Brahms’s gracious *Violin Concerto*.” Clearly, the performance ensemble and programming choices made were held up as reasons that the performance of Holst’s work was seemingly out of place, magnifying any deficiencies that Holst’s idiomatic sound presented to an audience alongside Berlioz and Brahms. On the work’s public reception, it was reported that “at the end the audience applauded persistently to show their appreciation of Mr. Holst, but not with that spontaneity which shows that a piece of music has come home to the hearers. There is nothing bewildering about a first hearing of it.” Again, comment is

³⁸ Royal Philharmonic Society – Brahms and Holst, *The Times*, February 24, 1928, 12.

made about “Holst’s deliberate technical style. It leaves no room for doubt that he has said precisely what he meant to say.” A great summation of what almost all reviews of Holst’s music hint at is found in the final sentence of the discussion on Holst – “Each listener may decide for himself whether it is what he wants to hear.” This performance was met with the same reserved appreciation as the previous one, with audiences hesitant in their applause and praise.

Egdon Heath could again be found in September of the same year in *The Times*, amongst a program of Bach transcriptions.³⁹ Even in such a program, Holst’s piece is described by the critic as the “quasi-novelty of the evening. “Regardless, the review (presumably from the same reviewer, judging by the tone and consistent use of descriptors like ‘uncompromising’, as well as continuing to discuss judgments made over repeated hearings) is much kinder to the work, stating “Mr Holst’s work grows on one, as one expected it would.” It continues with some poetic praise, describing the work as “Colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony, like the nature of man, it is. Attend to it we must, solve it we never shall.” The review describes Holst’s language in *Egdon Heath* as discordant but never jarring, and necessary. It finishes with the common ‘deliberate’ theme found so often among Holst’s reviews – “It does exactly what Mr Holst wanted it to do: it expresses Hardy’s “Egdon Heath.”

It is little wonder that comments such as “solve it we never shall” or “*Egdon Heath* is not likely to be popular” are found describing the work – this music seems to be placed in the ‘too hard’ basket, with performances suffering at the mercy of various circumstances unrelated to the music itself.

³⁹ “Promenade Concert, Holst’s ‘Egdon Heath,’” *The Times*, September 21, 1928, 12.

Four Songs for Voice and Violin

Reports of ten professional performances were found for Holst's 'Four Songs for Voice and Violin,' eight of which were given between 1921 and 1924, and two more spaced out a decade apart in 1934 and 1944. The first reviewed performance was found on January 26, 1921, in a recital by Gladys Moger in the Aeolian Hall of London. The critic stated that the Songs were "new to us," but the performance was poor by Violet Clark on violin.⁴⁰

An article in *The Musician* contained a brief analysis of the Four Songs at the beginning of February,⁴¹ but nothing in it mentioned any performances or reception of the work. Several weeks later, there was a press announcement that Winifred Griffin would sing the Four Songs accompanied by Dorothy Chalmers on violin in a Wigmore Hall recital on March 9, but no review followed.⁴² The Oriana Madrigal Society programmed Holst's Four Songs in their Christmas concert on December 15, 1921, where the critic pointed out that, "they are such extremely conscious music that they seem to hold up the ancient words for us to admire consciously";⁴³ obviously alluding to the process of directing audience attention to the profound meaning of the words, and the need to reflect upon them.

⁴⁰ "Recitals of the Week," *The Times*, January 28, 1921, 8.

⁴¹ Arthur Newson, "A Musical Experiment: Holst's Mediaeval Songs for Voice and Violin," *The Musician* 18 (February 1921), 120.

⁴² "This Week's Music," *The Times*, March 7, 1921, 8.

⁴³ "Carols Old and New," *The Times*, December 16, 1921, 10.

A thoughtful article on unaccompanied song mentioned Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin in passing, discussing Holst's effectiveness in using implied chords in his thin texture used in the work.⁴⁴ A performance of the Songs was given in the Aeolian Hall on May 29, 1924, by Evelyn Tierney accompanied by Dettmar Dressel on violin. The critic noted, "the composition has not the same inevitability [as others on the program] and the double stops on the violin left something to be desired."⁴⁵ There was a discussion by Herbert Antcliffe at the end of the run of the first four performances, but the Four Songs are merely referenced.⁴⁶ The Oriana Madrigal Society again programmed the Four Songs at their Christmas concert in 1928. The critic only mentioned in passing that the execution of the Holst Songs was poor, and did not provide the names of either singer or violinist.⁴⁷

Fugal Concerto

A review of the premiere of the *Fugal Concerto* is found in *The Times* (October 12, 1923) following the concert at the Queen's Hall the night before, with Holst conducting.⁴⁸ The work was described as being "in the spirit of the Brandenburg Concertos of Bach," and the critic commented on how "Mr Holst has here come nearer to formal perfection than in any of his previous works, without abandoning his individual point of view." A very vague account, but one which can be added to the very large pile

⁴⁴ "Unaccompanied Song," *The Times*, January 5, 1924, 8.

⁴⁵ "Music this Week," *The Times*, May 26, 1924, 21.

⁴⁶ There was a survey of British song composers, 1914-1924, which included a discussion of Holst's *Hymns from the Rig-Veda*, which was cited as an outstanding example of the "half-accompanied" song style. There was also a passing reference later in the article to Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin – but there is little of significance to be found. Herbert Antcliffe, "A Decade of English Song," *Musical Quarterly* 11: 2 (April 1925): 219-230.

⁴⁷ "Carols at Aeolian Hall," *The Times*, December 19, 1928, 10.

⁴⁸ "The Promenade Concerts – Mr. Holst's Fugal Concerto," *The Times*, October 12, 1923, 7.

of reviews that acknowledge Holst's skill in his craft, and his wholly individual compositional language.

The Golden Goose and Hecuba's Lament

A score review of the *Golden Goose* first appeared in *Music & Letters*, which is simply accompanied by the speculation that "it should go well."⁴⁹ A performance was given of Holst's choral ballet *The Golden Goose* in the castle ground of Warwick on the July 4, 1929, which was reviewed in *The Times*. The review mostly discusses the storyline and acting, but makes mention of Holst's music at the end of the piece stating that it "is not scored incisively enough to be effective out of doors, but in every other way it is admirably fitted to the simple tale."⁵⁰ Given that Holst's compositional language is sparse at the best of times, the outdoor setting having the effect of amplifying this, as the reviewer noted is no surprise, but no other reviews of this music were found to offer opinion on the musical content. Mention of Holst's choral work *Hecuba's Lament* in *The Times* is brief but very favourable.⁵¹ Set alongside the Schubert Mass in G, the Holst was well received as a "spacious and noble work," with the performers of the Junior Philharmonic Choir praised for their skill in the interpretation and execution of the performance.

⁴⁹ "Reviews of Music," *Music & Letters* 9, no.3 (July 1928), 288-289.

⁵⁰ "The Golden Goose – Mr. Holst's Choral Ballet," *The Times*, July 5, 1929, 14.

⁵¹ "Philharmonic Choir – Schubert, Holst, and Brahms," *The Times*, March 27, 1929, 12.

The Hymn of Jesus

The Hymn of Jesus received fewer performances in England than might be expected given its scale. Its first review was found in *The Times* the day after the performance (June 2, 1920), which was conducted by Holst (Albert Coates conducted the rest of the program).⁵² The critic noted that the subject matter “is exceedingly difficult to handle throughout in the lofty tone it demands.” Speaking to the appeal of the work, the review noted that it lay in the strongly held harmonies. Here again is the reference to the intentionality of Holst’s music, a common theme throughout many of the British reviews. While there was no mention of the reception of the performance by the audience in this review, the critic certainly wrote favorably about the musical content and execution of the performance. An even more sparkling review was evident in *The Times*, which noted that Holst “found mysticism between the lines of the Gnostic Hymn and brought beauty out of jargon.”⁵³ Speaking to the performance: “Holst’s work, by far the most complicated technically, was well and truly sung,” noting the Philharmonic Choir sang it previously in London and “now that the perilous moments are no longer perilous one realizes how well worthwhile they are.” The next review was of a performance from the Norwich Festival on October 31 that year,⁵⁴ titled “A Study in Contrasts: Verdi, Holst

⁵² “Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra – Holst and Delius,” *The Times*, June 3, 1920, 14.

⁵³ “Philharmonic Choir – Parry, Holst, and Franck,” *The Times*, March 14, 1924, 10.

⁵⁴ It is noted in Scholes’ *A Mirror of Music* that the *Hymn of Jesus* was “quickly taken up – Liverpool, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Leeds, Hereford (festival of 1921)... were merely some of the places that welcomed it.” Scholes, *A Mirror of Music*, 140. Reviews for these performances, however, were not found in the course of this research.

and Bach” in *The Times*.⁵⁵ This review was quite frank when dealing with Holst’s work, using descriptors such as:

Holst’s Gnosticism... one must suppose to be a conscious cult. In setting *The Hymn of Jesus* he recreated in music a mystical ritual which has long since lost its power, if it ever had one, to move any part of humanity.

This was tempered with the slight concession “his is, in fact, a brilliantly imaginative effort, but it goes no further.” Other works on the program were also described as “all the more a source of purest pleasures in contrast to that other hymn of Jesus which had just preceded Bach’s.” The critic did not seem to approve of Holst’s ‘ritual’ it would seem.

The next performance was not heard until 1929 in Southwark Cathedral. The report in *The Times* commented on the lack of performances that *The Hymn of Jesus* had received, saying it was “not to be heard in London just whenever one likes.”⁵⁶ It continued:

The Hymn of Jesus is not a passionate work, compelling attention by its obvious unity and singleness of mind. Nonetheless it has great qualities... [but] being in its nature a mosaic it needs rather a tight performance to produce the unity of effect which it undoubtedly possesses.

The performance received a good review; however, room was left for improvement in the conducting of Edgar Cook to produce that ‘tight performance’ in order to do the

⁵⁵ “The Norwich Festival – Verdi, Holst, and Bach,” *The Times*, October 31, 1924, 14.

⁵⁶ “Music at Southwark Cathedral, Kodály and Holst,” *The Times*, February 11, 1929, 17.

composition justice. There was no mention about the audience reception in the Cathedral in the review; however the tone used hinted at *The Hymn of Jesus* being more readily received than some other works of Holst.

The Morning of the Year

Holst's choral ballet *The Morning of the Year* seemed not to achieve the same harmonious resonance with audiences and critics compared with his ballet music from *The Perfect Fool*. Like much of his music, it was criticized as being too difficult. A *Times* review stated how *The Morning of the Year* "seemed too desultory and takes too long to get underway," but conceded "the fault may have been due, to some extent, to the performance, for neither orchestra nor chorus were sufficiently sure of the music."⁵⁷ The final word from the reviewer condemns "(a)t any rate, we felt that though an English ballet may be possible, this particular work has not achieved it." This sentiment speaks volumes for the aspiration towards a national consciousness that is British – a yearning for a national identity and tradition in music, dance and the arts. *The Morning of the Year* was performed several weeks later by the English Folk Dance Society, and reported in *The Times*.⁵⁸ In the context of the National dances, the critic tells:

Mr Holst's music is too uncompromising to express the happy character of the dance, though it may be a fair enough setting of Mr Stuart Wilson's words. Its contrapuntal dissonances are severe and seem to create an amount of friction

⁵⁷ "Royal College of Music - Holst's Choral Ballet," *The Times*, June 2, 1927, 14.

⁵⁸ "English Folk Dance Society – Mr. Holst's New Choral Ballet," *The Times*, June 20, 1927, 9.

which prevents the music swinging along in harmony with the smooth and rapid movements on the stage.

The Morning of the Year seemed destined not to be performed regularly, and the two reviews in *The Times* testified as to the cause.

The Perfect Fool

The ballet from *The Perfect Fool* was first heard in an open rehearsal given at the Royal College of Music at the end of June 1921, to a mixed reception. Among the other pieces heard, it was described as “the most interesting work” but was followed by “a question whether too much complication does not defeat its own end in the long run.”⁵⁹ Further criticism of the musical content continued “thematically the music is not quite good or original enough for the extreme vigour, variety, and brilliance of the orchestral treatment,” but concluded, “in the theatre, doubtless, with a well-planned choreography, the ballet would be very successful. When shall we hear the whole opera?” Ballet music from *The Perfect Fool* was premiered to the public at a Philharmonic concert in London under Albert Coates at the Queen’s Hall on December 1 that year. *The Times* review the following day saw a kind recounting of both the music and its reception.⁶⁰ It was seen as the buoyancy of the evening’s concert, with “a first performance of Holst’s Ballet Music from his opera *The Perfect Fool* restored vitality after the [Schumann Cello] Concerto.” The reception by the audience was captured with the opinion: “the music appealed straight to the large audience, for here was something which could be frankly enjoyed at a first hearing.”

⁵⁹ “The Perfect Fool – Ballet from Holst’s New Opera,” *The Times*, July 1, 1921, 8.

⁶⁰ “Holst’s New Ballet Music – Philharmonic Concert,” *The Times*, December 2, 1921, 8.

This enjoyment is hinted at in another review for the performance found in the *Musical Times*, stating “it [Ballet music from *The Perfect Fool*] ‘goes home’ not only with the knowing few but also with the bulk of an audience who mostly need some personal clue to the bearings of a new composer.”⁶¹ The review also importantly (though briefly) discussed Holst and the impact of his music:

Mr. Gustav Holst lives and works hard in the heart of London, and yet manages to be a recluse. Outside his special haunts – Hammersmith, the R.C.M., and Waterloo Road – he is personally unknown, and he is the last man in the world to court Press notoriety. It speaks then remarkably for his music, that – even when quite new, like his ballet music... brought Mr. Holst pretty well as much recognition as came to the hero of the evening's concerto [Casals].

This review demonstrated both the respect shown to Holst’s by those in the know, and his relative obscurity for those concert attenders who are unfamiliar with him. Either way, the ballet music from *The Perfect Fool* transcended both spheres of influence.

A very favorable review came the following year at a Promenade Concert where *The Perfect Fool* comprised the second half.⁶² The review was brief but flattering:

In part II, came Holst’s Ballet from *The Perfect Fool*. Who the perfect fool is is as dead a secret as Elgar’s Enigma. He is not Wagner’s Reiner Thor, anyway. He has mundane, everyday wits about him; he, or somebody, both giggles in flute

⁶¹ W. McNaught, “London Concerts,” *The Musical Times* 63, no. 947, (January 1, 1922), 41.

⁶² Promenade Concerts – Holst’s ‘The Perfect Fool,’ *The Times*, September 22, 1922, 8.

ripples and clarinet cascades, and roars with laughter in great leaps on the brass.

The whole has a tremendous rhythm, tossed from one kind to another, and, with the composer to conduct, this rhythm was carried through to perfection.

The full opera had to wait until 1923 for its premiere. It was the headline season opener for the British National Opera Company, being described in *The Times* as its “first essay in native opera,” and “probably the shortest work which has ever been given an evening to itself.”⁶³ *The Perfect Fool* was seen as “a new opera not only in the sense that the bills advertised ‘first performance,’ but in the larger one of bringing a new element into the operatic repertory.” When talking about the ballet, it is said that “no one of the Russians is more ingenious than Holst is, finding incisive rhythms, and driving them along with bold reiteration and pungent harmony. The ballet music... is the most brilliant thing in a work glittering with brilliant moments.”

Shortly after the British Opera performance, Edwin Evans provided an in-depth analysis of *The Perfect Fool* in *The Musical Times*.⁶⁴ The beginning of the article expounded on Holst’s knack of being “the exception that proves the rule” – in this case referring to the ability to produce a work in theatre without intimate knowledge of the area. He concluded:

That is what Holst has done in *The Perfect Fool*. Though it is not his first opera, he is not a man of the theatre...[but] in *The Perfect Fool*, he has given us old ingredients confectioned into a new dish, of a kind that the theatrical expert would

⁶³ The Perfect Fool – Holst Opera at Covent Garden, *The Times*, May 15, 1923, 12.

⁶⁴ Edwin Evans, “The Perfect Fool,” *The Musical Times* 64, no. 964 (June 1, 1923), 389-393.

have regarded as courting disaster. And, like most of the things Holst attempts, it ‘comes off.’

The article speaks very favourably on the whole about Holst, and is a prime case to see the support for the building of a British identity in the operatic genre.

Donald Tovey produced an article in *The Musical Times* that was glowing in its praise for *The Perfect Fool*.⁶⁵ Statements such as “*The Perfect Fool* is a great work of art; and its vein of parody has the effect of renewing our appetite for the things parodied” highlight the excitement that was attached to Holst’s newest opera.

An article by Robert Percival in 1926 on the economic and business side of operatic productions used Holst in its discussion. Percival, in dissecting the difficulties in producing operas, lists cost as the most prohibitive aspect. He is dismayed that certain works are tied to certain areas and not produced elsewhere in Britain – citing *The Perfect Fool* as well as Stanford’s *Travelling Companion* as two examples he had personally encountered. *Savitri*, too, is mentioned in the article, which is discussed below in its own section.⁶⁶

A “revival” by the British National Opera Company of *The Perfect Fool* in 1924, given alongside a performance of *Savitri*, was reviewed in *The Times*.⁶⁷ It did not fare as well as the previous year. It was stated “one fears that *The Perfect Fool* is not wearing well with acquaintance... much of the remainder is too naive in its humor to bear repeated

⁶⁵ Donald Tovey, “The Perfect Fool; or the Perfect Opera,” *The Musical Times* 64, no. 965 (July 1, 1923), 464-465.

⁶⁶ Robert Percival, “Can Opera be Made to Pay?” *Music & Letters* 7, no. 2 (April 1926), 114-119.

⁶⁷ “Opera at Covent Garden – Holst’ ‘Savitri’ and ‘The Perfect Fool,’” *The Times*, January 10, 1924, 10.

hearing... The performance, as a whole, did not go well.” Also adding to the negative response was the dissatisfaction at the darkness of the stage throughout the performance. Regardless of this review, the fact that the British National Opera Company included Holst’s works two years in a row points to the importance placed on an English composer attempting to add to the neglected English operatic repertoire. Both *The Perfect Fool* and *Savitri* scored major points for Holst in the eyes of the critics and in turn, recognition from the greater musical public. Perhaps the theme of *The Perfect Fool* lent itself to the masses more so than his other works, or perhaps it was the significance of the new addition to the British opera repertoire, but critics and the public alike - unlike most of Holst’s other works, embraced *The Perfect Fool* unanimously.

The Planets

Without question *The Planets* is Holst’s best-known work, and arguably the most recognized piece of English symphonic writing in the repertoire.⁶⁸ It has received more coverage than all of his other works, and numerous books have covered aspects of its composition and reception. Greene’s *The Planets*, for example, analyses fifty-four reviews from the initial four performances from major and minor sources.⁶⁹ Outlined here will be some of the major reviews from performances, with further analysis following in Chapter Three.

⁶⁸ Many commentators in the last ten years have expressed this viewpoint. It is expressed in utterances of Holst (and thus inevitably *The Planets*) to the point of achieving the status of common general knowledge.

⁶⁹ Richard Greene, *Holst: The Planets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

The public premiere of the work in May 1919 saw the *Neptune* and *Venus* movements omitted, but the impact was immediately felt, with Alfred Kalisch stating, “let it be said at once that the Suite scored an emphatic success.”⁷⁰ There is a small analysis of *Mars* given, but the idea was mostly conveyed, “the suite was finely played and loudly applauded.” A Queen’s Hall performance of the work in November 1919 saw a slightly insecure blip at the start to of its life, with *The Times* stating “it was a case of the half – or at least three-sevenths – being greater than the whole.”⁷¹ Only three movements were performed on this occasion – Venus, Jupiter and Mercury. Of these three, it was noted:

Each listener will make his own choice among the three...some will like cool open fifths and the glowing melodies for solo violin and cello in ‘Venus’, others will be glad to breathe the ozone of ‘Jupiter’...We were ourselves more smitten with the busy-ness and the motley incident of ‘Mercury.’

The three movements appeared to catch the attention of the public and the reviewer (presumably Colles), who described the three movements of *The Planets* as “the first music by an Englishman we have heard for some time which is neither conventional nor negligible, which stands on its feet and moves its hands and knows what it is doing and where it is going, which is strong and capable.” The ever-present backdrop of everyone seeking something uniquely ‘English’ is partially expressed here.

Kalisch reviewed this Queen’s Hall performance for *The Musical Times*, and comparing it to the first performance, stated that Adrian Boult’s conducting was more vibrant than

⁷⁰ Alfred Kalisch, “London Concerts,” *The Musical Times* 60, no. 914 (April 1, 1919), 178-180.

⁷¹ “Holst and Busoni,” *The Times*, November 24, 1919, 12.

Holst's 'intellectual' leadership in this performance. He concludes once more, however, "in any event, it is a notable work."⁷²

The first complete public performance was given on November 15, 1920. Kalisch summarised the reception, as well as the effect of performing the suite in its entirety:

The concert was memorable for the first complete performance of Mr. Gustav Holst's 'The Planets.' It would be superfluous again to discuss this very remarkable work in detail. It is a good testimonial to the taste of the public that at each repetition it is received with greater enthusiasm... The performance was remarkably fine, and the playing of Strauss's 'Don Juan' was also extraordinarily brilliant.⁷³

Kalisch perhaps leaned towards hyperbole here in his remarks about the level of performance, but it can be taken that the orchestra was clearly in fine form.

The Planets was next given by the LSO in November 1921 under Albert Coates. This performance received a great review in *The Times*, and one that reflects the 'can't quite place it' mentality that seemingly always accompanied Holst and his music.⁷⁴

Holst's tunes are not exactly 'melodious' – not the thing you put in your pocket and carry home with you. They are mighty: they send you away feeling bigger than you came. It is difficult to say what causes this. Perhaps it is that they come only because they are meant, and stay long enough for you to be sure that they are

⁷² Alfred Kalisch, "London Concerts," *The Musical Times* 61, no. 923 (January 1, 1920), 32-34.

⁷³ Alfred Kalisch, "London Concerts," *The Musical Times* 61, no. 934 (December 1, 1920), 820-823.

⁷⁴ "Holst's 'The Planets,'" *The Times*, November 8, 1921, 5.

what he really wants to say... We can't understand, of course, what all those wonderful discords are doing, but somehow we don't doubt or even suspect them.

Further praise to Holst's skill in orchestration was acknowledged by the critic, followed by a summation that "there are only two thing we can't do. We can't say how it is done, and we can't not listen." This music was clearly appealing to the musical public, and being appreciated by most.

Interestingly, there is a brief questioning of Holst's originality encountered in the next review. In a concert given in Leeds on October 4, 1922, once again under Albert Coates, it was noted that Rimsky-Korsakov inspired parts of the suite.⁷⁵ However, this is followed up by a concession that the end of "Saturn" produced a positive reaction and a 'vivid experience' for some audience members. In contrast to the original opinion was the summation:

However, to hear 'The Planets' well done is always such a stimulating experience. It contains such an extraordinary variety of musical invention, and even those who are more repelled than attracted by the work as a whole can take delight in beauties by the way.

It was noted in the review that the performance was not altogether a good one – there were intonation issues with the orchestra and with the choir in *Neptune*. A suggestion for the work's popularity is provided in this review as well, in particular to *Mars* and under a subheading of 'Holst's Vividness.'

⁷⁵ "A Parry Concert – Rimsky-Korsakov and Holst," *The Times*, October 6, 1922, 8.

It was reported that “Mars,” apparently, is becoming one of the most popular of the seven numbers. To me it always seems as brutal a noise as that of a sixty-pounder battery in action: perhaps that is its justification.

This example, along with the report of the audience member’s reaction at the end of *Saturn* reflects on the power of the music, and its impact on the listener. The review also showed the evolution of *The Planets* in the public consciousness – with a movement becoming more popular with repetition than others without.

The next performance was given in a Promenade Concert at the Queen’s Hall in August 1923, with four movements performed and Holst conducting. The review’s first paragraph is very telling of the importance of *The Planets* for Holst and his public image. It stated:

Mr Gustav Holst seems to have achieved the position, rare for an Englishman, of being a really popular composer. It was evidently to hear him conduct four movements of his “Planets” Suite that a large audience gathered in the Queen’s Hall last night, and the composer had an ovation which was only exceeded in loudness by his own music.⁷⁶

The review also commented on the originality of Holst’s style, saying:

⁷⁶ “Promenade Concerts – Mr. Holst’s “Planets” Suite,” *The Times*, August 29, 1923, 12.

It is as though Mr. Holst were applying to *form* the practice of modern harmony, which omits the steps formerly considered necessary between one chord and the next, and purposely omitted the transitional passages which the ear expects.

Once again the common view is reinforced, that “Mars” was the most impressive movement.

Richard Capell’s third instalment in a series of articles on Holst in 1927 focussed on *The Planets*.⁷⁷ Capell romantically and poetically expounded at length over each movement, focussing on the imagery suggested by the astrological bodies that the name of each movement was taken. There is no doubt that Capell’s message was that *The Planets* is a great work, and indeed Holst’s greatest at that point, however, it reads more like prose than a musical analysis.

The Planets was not performed in England again until after Holst’s death in 1934, but a performance emerged in the interim in Vienna in 1927. A concert of English music was given by the Vienna Philharmonic Society at the closing of the English Picture Exhibition which included Elgar, Delius and Holst. Five of the movements from *The Planets* were presented under Mr Paul Kerby to a positive review, but more interesting was the suggestion from the correspondent that “it is hoped that this concert will be followed up by the visit of some representative choir, who could give such works as the ‘Sea Symphony’ and the ‘Hymn of Jesus’.”⁷⁸ That the *Hymn of Jesus* is at the forefront of demand for ‘representative’ English music that should be exported to a cultural centre like Vienna also speaks volumes for Holst’s rising image as a popular English composer.

⁷⁷ Richard Capell, “Gustav Holst (III),” *Music & Letters* 8, no. 1 (January 1927), 73-82.

⁷⁸ “English Music in Vienna,” *The Times*, November 11, 1927, 14.

The performance by Dr. Adrian Boult at the Queen's Hall of the complete *Planets* suite on October 31, 1934, was positively reviewed in *The Times*, but was particularly interesting in its discussion of the suite being performed in fragments more often than not:

As the whole takes nearly an hour and there is no reason beyond effective contrast why the numbers should be played in sequence, programme-makers have got into the habit of picking out the more popular numbers to fill odd corners of their schemes. We are not likely often to hear *The Planets* complete. It was a good thing, therefore, to set the whole... the fine performance brought out the beauties of its clear scintillating orchestration and enabled the hearers to rediscover for themselves the many charms of the less frequently played numbers.⁷⁹

There was a Royal Choral Society commemorative concert given in tribute to Holst, Delius, and Elgar in November 1934, conducted by Dr. Malcolm Sargent.⁸⁰ Several of the movements of *The Planets* were performed as well as the *Ode to Death*. The performance received quite a scathing review, and the venue deemed "in one of its tiresome moods," but this was directed at the actual playing not the musical content.

We can analyse a later review in *The Times* found in 1965 for a retrospective word on *The Planets*.⁸¹ Titled "Ageless Work by Holst," it acknowledges that for the New Philharmonia Orchestra "English music (nor English musicians...) did not often enter into their scheme of things in days gone by." *The Planets* was described as a "tonic" for

⁷⁹ "B.B.C. Symphony Concert – Holst and Scriabin," *The Times*, November 1, 1934, 12.

⁸⁰ "The Royal Choral Society – Delius, Elgar, and Holst," *The Times*, November 5, 1934, 10.

⁸¹ "Ageless Work by Holst," *The Times*, March 2, 1965, 8.

them to play under Sir Adrian Boult, and that “the work itself, though 45 years old, is in fact ageless: not only its horizontal techniques... give it a validity for today, but also its reaching out into territory beyond human comprehension.” While not as large a turnaround as the retrospective looks at some of the other major works of Holst, this opinion of *The Planets* resonates right through to today.

Rig Veda

There is only one report of the *Rig Veda Hymns* found in *The Times* in 1922, and it described Holst’s work as “very great music.”⁸² It continued to point out some of the devices used, and that “they do get... the mysticism without the orientalism, sham or real.” The performance was conducted by Vaughan Williams at the Queen’s Hall to a very positive review, although no mention was made regarding the audience’s reaction.

Savitri

The first performance of *Savitri* was given at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith on June 23, 1921, and was reviewed the following day.⁸³ The opera could not have received a warmer welcome. Speaking of its place in the repertoire, the review strongly declared, “*Savitri* is a thing apart, a perfect little masterpiece of its kind, and we can think of nothing else which belongs to the same kind... *Savitri* is to most modern opera what the clavichord is to a grand piano.” The critic continues to speak highly of *Savitri*’s construction, expounding “there is not a phrase or a note which is not doing the work of

⁸² “The Bach Choir – Holst’s Rig Veda Hymns,” *The Times*, April 8, 1922, 10.

⁸³ “Savitri – Holst’s Unconventional Opera,” *The Times*, June 24, 1921, 13.

expression, and the result is that one listens breathlessly to every slight intonation of the voice, and every instrumental touch becomes immensely significant..." The work was well received, with the report that the conductor and ensemble were given warm applause by the audience. The work being described as a perfect little masterpiece would surely have been influential on readers of the review, and would have built interest for subsequent performances.

In a review entitled "A Future for Opera," *Savitri* was reviewed after a discussion of the opening of the new Royal College of Music Theatre.⁸⁴ Subheaded "A New Idiom", the critic refers to a second hearing at the new theatre, with the same cast as the Hammersmith performance. While he did not go into much detail about the work (having "already recorded our impressions"), he nonetheless restated the importance of the work for English opera:

It is the occasional appearance of such works [*Savitri*] which keeps us convinced that there is a future for English opera of a serious kind... It belongs to no accepted category of opera, refers to no precedents, but creates its own idiom in the process of surrounding a beautiful idea with an imaginative musical atmosphere.

J.B Trend provided a comprehensive analysis of the background and story of *Savitri* in his article "Savitri, an Opera from the Sanskrit."⁸⁵ He focussed heavily on his explanation of the story, its sources, and background in Sanskrit. Trend lavished praise on Holst for his material chosen for use:

⁸⁴ "A Future for Opera – Holst's *Savitri*," *The Times*, July 16, 1921, 8.

⁸⁵ J.B. Trend, "Savitri, an Opera from the Sanskrit," *Music & Letters* 2, no. 4 (October 1921), 345-350.

It is characteristic of Mr. Holst's attitude – characteristic, too, of his genius – that he has concentrated upon two aspects of the story: its humanity and its mysticism... The libretto, as has been said, is a simplified and more direct version of the original story.

Trend signed off his article by praising the intimate (smaller) nature and staging, and highlighted that it is quite unique from anything else that was produced in London recently.

An unfavourable review of the next performance given at Covent Garden in June 1923 was found in *The Times*.⁸⁶ The tone is set by the opening phrase: "Gustav Holst's opera has come to Covent Garden, but it is no longer the same as it once was." The larger stage and space "fail to create any atmosphere," and "it is no one's fault exactly – the greater size spoils it." This review does not offer much, as little more was covered, only reasoning as to why the performance didn't work due to the performance space.

The 1924 "revival" – humorous in that it was a mere 6 months after the previous performance – received a dismal review in *The Times*, once again attributed to the larger space of Covent Garden, where "many of the finer shades" were lost.⁸⁷ While a lot went wrong in the performance leading to the muted reception, it was still noted: "there remains so much beauty that one is glad that the company are keeping the work in their repertoire." There seemed an underlying mission from *The Times* critic to push the

⁸⁶ "Savitri – Mr. Holst's Opera at Covent Garden," *The Times*, June 29, 1923, 12.

⁸⁷ "Opera at Covent Garden – Holst's Savitri and The Perfect Fool," *The Times*, January 10, 1924, 10.

importance of Holst's contribution to 'English' opera, regardless of the result of a given performance – seen in many of the reviews of *Savitri*.

Continuing the solid run of *Savitri*, the Mayson Opera Singers performed it at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art on February 20, 1924, reviewed the following day in *The Times*.⁸⁸ Once more the plight of this new opera is recognized: “the performances were sufficiently good to make one realize still more the lack of a permanent home for the production of works of the [smaller] kind.” Once again, the production failed to do the work justice, and one senses the effort the reviewer exerts in avoiding discussing it in a negative light so as not to discourage performances of the 'English' opera. No comment regarding the audience reception was made.

The following performance was given in 1931, with a production mounted by the Royal College of Music, reviewed in *The Times*.⁸⁹ *Savitri* opened an evening that also saw Arthur Benjamin's *The Devil Take Her*, and the review focused mainly on the latter. A common theme with this critic, the performance space was mentioned: “*Savitri* we know, but it was good to see and hear it carefully produced in these conditions, for its aloofness of thought and feeling and the severity of its musical style are qualities which must be kept off the stage of the ordinary theatre.” The performance and all involved was praised in the limited review.

A half-review was given in *The Times* of a performance of *Savitri* in April 1935, but only in passing mention with no substance given.⁹⁰ Later that year, *Savitri* was put on

⁸⁸ “The Mayson Opera Singers,” *The Times*, February 21, 1924, 10.

⁸⁹ “Royal College of Music – *Savitri*,” *The Times*, December 2, 1931, 10.

⁹⁰ “An Indian Matinee – *Savitri*,” *The Times*, April 3, 1935, 12.

alongside Puccini's *Trittico* in Sadler's Wells Theatre, and was reviewed in *The Times*.⁹¹

The common theme was once more observed, where the performance space was not suitable for the more intimate nature of the work, leading to a less than flattering performance.

A 1951 performance of *Savitri* was reviewed in *The Times*, with an eye-catching comment regarding Imogen Holst's discussion about the work.⁹²

Chief [on the program] was Holst's opera *Savitri* conducted by the composer's daughter, who was better in her deeds than in her severe words about a work with unique claims to truth and beauty. The drama has been fined away to simple, direct words, which are Holst's own, and are set with his wonderful economy and the directness of his very original mind.

There was no mention of what Imogen Holst's severe words were, but they were enough for the reviewer to feel the need to mention them. Here, too, is yet another example of a review that acknowledges almost an automatic characteristic of Holst's originality and skill in economy of writing.

We have set the scene by extracting information from performance reviews and articles about the reception of Holst's work. It is now important to turn analytical attention to a more historiographical portrait, which can be gained through sources like biographies, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and British music monographs in order to provide a richer context.

⁹¹ "Sadler's Wells – Holst and Puccini," *The Times*, October 24, 1935, 12.

⁹² "Kalmar Orchestra – Savitri," *The Times*, November 3, 1951, 8.

A Historiography of Holst

The first mention of Gustav Holst found in a contemporary account of modern composers was in Sydney Grew's *Our Favorite Musicians* in 1922.⁹³ Grew's accounts of the various composers (the book is subtitled "From Stanford to Holbrooke") is overly poetic and large parts of each chapter contain detailed recreations of the circumstances in which he met the composers.⁹⁴ He described Holst's good nature, stating, "I doubt if anyone has met Holst and not felt the spiritual sincerity of his nature."⁹⁵ Grew also gave his opinion on the state of English music at the time – making Holst exempt from the excesses of over-sentimentality or the 'extremism' attached to the notion of 'ultra-modernism':

Modernism in England has sent several composers back to mediaeval poetry; they do not all treat the poetry in the established cantata manner of Walford Davies' "Everyman" and "Song of the Sun," but endeavour to discover that music which is the exact re-expression of the text. The "Hymn of Jesus" is too large a work to be studied except by help of good performances...

This "modernism" of ours is a many-sided matter. It is represented by several of the composers referred to in this book; yet none of them is what is called an "ultra-modernist." Holst in particular is not extreme: first because the stages of

⁹³ Sydney Grew, *Our Favorite Musicians – From Stanford to Holbrooke* (London, T.N. Foulis Ltd, 1922).

⁹⁴ Grew described in detail the walk he took with Holst around London, and both his and Holst's reactions to the various parts. A large amount of the coverage is extraneous information like this, and was not limited to Holst's chapter but was universal throughout the book.

⁹⁵ Grew, 182.

his growth are visible at every step and turn; secondly because his newest music sounds natural when you know it; and thirdly because it attaches itself always to the large subjects of life. It is never violently sentimental in the common manner of Liszt and Richard Strauss and Gerg [sic] Schumann. Its joy is ecstasy, its expression of death noble, and in it are sounded almost all the ranges of pure love.⁹⁶

It is clear that Grew found Holst's music less extreme than others writing during the 1920s,⁹⁷ and he portrays Holst's music favourably – unsurprising for a book called *Our Favourite Musicians*.

Two years later, Holst was discussed in the appendix of Walker's revised edition of his *History of Music* (1924).⁹⁸ Vaughan Williams was placed immediately before him: "In many ways the influence of the work of Ralph Vaughan Williams (b. 1872) is among the most powerful forces in contemporary English music."⁹⁹ The grouping of Holst and Vaughan Williams together in a historical context was already established in 1924, and Walker captured this:

Different as the two individualities palpably are, it is a very easy step from the work of Vaughan Williams to that of Gustav Holst (b. 1874): their names can be mentally coupled as can no other pair of names among our composers of to-day.... He is another instance of slowly-ripening genius, and it is only comparatively

⁹⁶ Grew, 203-204.

⁹⁷ The collection of reviews discussed later in this chapter will show some critics' shock at Holst's compositional language.

⁹⁸ This was first revision of the 1907 original, where Holst was not mentioned. Ernest Walker, *A History of Music in England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 370.

⁹⁹ Walker, 370.

recently that his real power has been displayed. On the whole, he is less versatile than his contemporaries...his powerful individuality is, as a rule, held firmly to one straight path. Like Vaughan Williams, he aims at the essential and disregards everything else: but his speech is more starkly direct and his texture, equally masterly in its technique, is considerably simpler. Often, as in the *Hymn of Jesus* (a setting of a Gnostic ritual) or the *Neptune* section of the spacious orchestral suite *The Planets*, he strains normal harmonic language very severely: but the strain comes, not from any complexity of inside detail, but simply from the meeting of massive forces none of which will give way.¹⁰⁰

Walker highlighted Holst's *Ode to Death* (1919) as an important work for British music, stating "But it is the splendid setting of Whitman's *Ode to Death*, one of the chief landmarks of modern English music, that we see Holst's massive powers at their fullest."

¹⁰¹ Walker balanced his praise with a reflection of the other end of the reception spectrum – Holst's requirement for the audience to give up their conservative legacy to appreciate something new – an approach that often sat uncomfortably in the early twentieth century mindset:

When the first freshness of the curious beauty of such things as the four religious songs for voice and violin has passed off, some of us may perhaps feel as if we had been shut up in a small room and asked to part with a large share of our musical birth right...¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Walker, 371-372.

¹⁰¹ Walker, 371-372.

¹⁰² Walker, 373.

The forging of new nationalistic music was clearly not always comfortable, but overall the reflection on Holst was positive, and Walker's reflection of the pairing of Holst and Vaughan Williams would entrench the pattern of most accounts of British music for the rest of the century.

Edwin Evans' treatment of Holst in the 1927 *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* was supportive of the composer, opening with the accolade: "one of the most prominent composers in England of his generation."¹⁰³ Evans noted that after *The Planets* and *The Hymn of Jesus* "Holst suddenly became a celebrity from whom great works were expected."¹⁰⁴ Evans explained that Holst's name acquired enhanced prominence after performances at the provincial festivals from the 1922 Leeds Festival performance of *Ode to Death*, the British National Opera Company's productions of *Savitri* in 1923 through to *At the Boar's Head* in 1925. The *Grove's* entry, in essence, outlined that the post-*Planets* Holst saw a transition from a respected colleague in a closed circle of composers to a household name.

Gerald Abraham, in his discussion on contemporary music *This Modern Stuff* (1933),¹⁰⁵ discussed Holst's music in a consideration of his harmonic language. Abraham noted that aside from the gradual acceptance of familiar discords as concords, there were examples now of those like: "Holst or Delius will sometimes use a chord 'that never was' simply because he likes it or because he wants its particular flavour to express something."¹⁰⁶ Abraham also highlighted Holst's construction of chords built on fourths such as those used in the Choral Symphony (1924) as the best examples to be found at

¹⁰³ Edwin Evans, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 3rd Ed. Vol. 2, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1927), 657-659.

¹⁰⁴ Evans, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," 658.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald Abraham, *This Modern Stuff* (Hoddesdon: Denis Archer, 1933).

¹⁰⁶ Abraham, 40.

that point in time. He continued using several Holst examples for illustrating various points of modern harmony, using phrases like: “As usual, Holst will provide us with a clear and simple example.”¹⁰⁷ Abraham’s discussions, while analytical in nature, held Holst in high regard for his compositional skill.

By 1935 when Pratt’s *History of Music* (1935)¹⁰⁸ was published, Holst was being referred to as a “fertile and original genius,” with the entry including a list of his important works that notably ceased at *The Hymn of Jesus* (1917), even though this revised edition was published in 1935.¹⁰⁹ The entry of Vaughan Williams, (notably placed directly above that of Holst), also lists works no later than 1917, but death dates in this edition were clearly updated to go right up to the 1930s. It would seem that revisions were relatively superficial. Comparable treatments were given to other contemporary composers such as Coleridge-Taylor and Bantock.

Two years later, Constant Lambert’s *Music Ho!* (1937)¹¹⁰ is noteworthy for ignoring Holst in the English music narrative, instead holding Vaughan Williams in much higher regard:

In Elgar, the first figure of importance since Boyce, we get an example of a composer, in touch both with his audience and his period, expressing himself nationally in an international language. It is more than probable that, but for the social and spiritual changes brought about by the war, Elgar

¹⁰⁷ Abraham, 73.

¹⁰⁸ Waldo Selden Pratt, *The History of Music* (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1935), 684.

¹⁰⁹ In the 1907 first edition there is no mention of Holst, but the book only covers the period until the turn of the twentieth century, when Holst was still a student at the Royal College of Music. Waldo Selden Pratt, *The History of Music* (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc, 1907).

¹¹⁰ Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 283.

would have been a more potent influence on English music than Vaughan Williams; but the aggressive Edwardian prosperity that lends so comfortable a background to Elgar's finales is now as strange to us as the England that produced *Greensleeves* and *The Woodes so Wilde*. Stranger, in fact, and less sympathetic. In consequence much of Elgar's music, through no fault of its own, has for the present generation an almost intolerable air of smugness, self-assurance and autocratic benevolence.¹¹¹

This view in 1937 of British musical development shows the mindset of some contemporary commentators - Vaughan Williams was held in higher regard than other contemporary British composers. Gerald Abraham reflected on impressionism the following year in *A Hundred Years of Music* stating, "... the *Neptune* movement of Holst's *Planets* (comp. 1915) is perhaps the most remarkable piece of pure orchestral impressionism ever written."¹¹² Aside from this remark, Holst is almost completely overlooked in favour of Vaughan Williams, whom Abraham almost solely credited with folk-song revival:

The evolution from folk-song of a rather consciously English idiom can be traced very easily in the work of Vaughan Williams; and most of the younger English composers whose music has a folk-songish accent seem to be almost as heavily indebted to Vaughan Williams as to the genuine, original article.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Lambert, 283-284.

¹¹² Gerald Abraham, *A Hundred Years of Music* (London: Duckworth, 1938), 247.

¹¹³ Abraham, 267-268.

Walton, Bax and Warlock all have more coverage and importance placed on their contributions than does Holst, but all are a distant second to Vaughan Williams in this account.

The fourth edition of *Grove's*¹¹⁴ contained the same Edwin Evans article from the third edition (1927), however there was additional information provided in the Supplement to the 4th edition. Colles edited the Supplement, and the article on Holst within was also his work. Colles picked up from the 1927 article, noting that it had recorded activities only until 1925. This article contained a focussed discussion of Holst's First Choral Symphony, and noted that Holst's works in the various festivals had contributed to making him a composer of worth in England, all the while stating that "he did not seek the grander occasions, and he was more likely to be stimulated by those which he had made himself, as a school concert at St. Paul's, or a performance of the Whitsuntide Singers."¹¹⁵

Five years later, Holst was presented as a kind of enigma¹¹⁶ by Abraham in Bacharach's *British Music of Our Time* published in 1946.¹¹⁷ The very opening of the chapter begins:

It is already clear that, like Berlioz, Holst belongs to that small but intensely interesting class of composers about whom there can be no general agreement,

¹¹⁴ Edwin Evans, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 4th Ed. Vol. 2, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1940), 657-659.

¹¹⁵ H.C. Colles, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 4th Ed. Supplement, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1940), 282-284.

¹¹⁶ Enigma in the sense of an unsolved problem, question or paradox.

¹¹⁷ Gerald Abraham, "Gustav Holst: 1874-1934." In *British Music of Our Time*, edited by A. Bacharach (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1946), 44-63

who are indeed predestined by the nature of their art to be the subjects of very sharp critical disagreement...¹¹⁸

Abraham continued in this vein stating, “Berlioz is a sort of legitimate ‘blind spot.’ So is Holst.”¹¹⁹ The chapter gives an outline of Holst’s compositional style and its development from Wagnerian influence through to finding his own unique and mature voice (noted as becoming apparent in *Savitri*.) Abraham cited the biography written by Imogen Holst as containing the only available information and materials that were useful to his own writings, at the same time offering the alternate perspective on Holst’s music, using Cecil Gray’s negative arguments from *A Survey of Contemporary Music*¹²⁰ to counterbalance his own. Whilst discussing many of Holst’s major works, resources such as articles written by Fritz Hart are mentioned, already seen as a champion of Holst’s work in publication.¹²¹ Abraham’s chapter is a passionate call for attention to what he deemed in 1946 as a neglected and unfairly dismissed British composer. He leaves no doubt about his message, categorically stating “some of us – I am one – consider the mature Holst one of the most truly ‘original’ and individual composers of the twentieth century.”

The following year Scholes’ *Mirror of Music* (1947)¹²² included a small discussion of some of Holst’s works including the *Ode to Death*, the Choral Symphony and *The Hymn of Jesus*. Here, once again Holst’s ‘originality’ was discussed – a term repeated with

¹¹⁸ Abraham, *British Music of Our Time*, 44.

¹¹⁹ While it is difficult to know what may be ‘legitimate’ about a ‘blind spot’, nevertheless this sentiment really strikes a chord with the author, as it is this ‘blind spot’ that I agree is in sync with contemporary opinion about Holst and his music. Much of the time, he appears hidden in plain sight – at once labelled a “fertile and original genius” (Pratt) and then completely ignored or overlooked in favour of Vaughan Williams (Abraham).

¹²⁰ Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* (London: Ayer Co Pub, 1924).

¹²¹ Fritz Hart, “Early Memories of Gustav Holst,” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 39, no. 2, 43-52.

¹²² Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944 – A century of Musical Life in Britain as reflected in the pages of the Musical Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 139-141.

such banality that it had almost become a necessary inclusion in any writings for many reviewers in Britain for the first half of the twentieth century:

Thenceforward, for over twenty years, this composer frequently brought forward some new choral work, and, whether it pleased or not, admittedly it was always something of character, dictated by a very original personality.¹²³

Scholes' feelings of regret towards the infrequent performances of Holst's music were shown too, when reflecting on how performances of his music would often become less frequent and fade completely only shortly after a premiere, and how Holst performances in general were rare at that time.¹²⁴

For a time some of these works continued to be repeated, and then they dropped out – temporarily, perhaps, but it must be admitted that at the period when the present book is being written [1940s] it is (unfortunately, as the writer feels) only rather rarely that one can find an opportunity of hearing any one of them.¹²⁵

Also in 1947, Palmer's *British Music*¹²⁶ gave a two-page treatment of Vaughan Williams, with decent coverage also given to those like Arnold Bax, Delius, Coleridge-Taylor and Boughton. There was an entry on the violinist Henry Holst, which contained the same amount of biographical information as that of Gustav Holst. This was certainly not an entry afforded to a prominent musician.

¹²³ Scholes, 139.

¹²⁴ This conclusion is supported by the lack of evidence for performances in Britain around the time of publication of this book – while World War II would certainly have been a factor in musical programs, the general music scene seemingly had 'cooled' off on its support of Holst's music into the 1940s.

¹²⁵ Scholes, 140-141.

¹²⁶ Russell Palmer, *British Music* (London: Skelton Robinson, 1947).

In order to briefly preview how accounts later in the century impacted Holst's 'Missing Man' status – one that persists into the twenty-first century that I will argue is in need of immediate redress - a small exploration into later accounts and secondary sources which discuss English music of the period is useful.¹²⁷

Later Accounts and Secondary Sources

In 1963, a tiny biographical account attributing no importance to Holst is rendered in the *Pergamon Dictionary of Musicians and Music*.¹²⁸ Similar accounts are presented on other contemporary composers of that time such as Coleridge Taylor and Delius, but (as usual) there was much more attention paid to Vaughan Williams.

The English Musical Renaissance, published in 1966, gave a large amount of coverage to Holst.¹²⁹ An entire chapter titled "Holst and Vaughan Williams: Emancipation" begins:

The actual emancipation of our national music from bondage to the continent, the potential foundation of an English national school of composition, was the work of two composers, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, both men of radical temper who happened also to be close friends.

¹²⁷ This exploration is small in that it serves to illustrate the general opinions on Holst and his music in comparison to the accounts discussed above. A complete survey of all the materials available would be far too expansive for discussion in this thesis.

¹²⁸ Robert Illing, *Pergamon Dictionary of Musicians and Music* (London: Pergamon Press, 1963), 63-64.

¹²⁹ Frank Howes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), 230.

This chapter explores many of the works by the two composers, and, as the title and introduction suggest, credits their contribution to British national music. This is a rare occurrence where almost equal credit is given to Holst in his role in the establishment of a British musical identity alongside Vaughan Williams.

Examining even more current opinion, this lens of equal attribution is also presented in 2001 by Geoffrey Self in *Light Music in Britain Since 1870*.¹³⁰ When presented alongside more ‘popular’ music and band music of the day, Holst and Vaughan William’s works are noted as the higher end of achievement for the period, being the more ‘serious’ composers to produce ‘light music.’ After the discussion on some of the ‘heavier works’ of the two composers, Self explained:

Both Vaughan Williams and Holst kept close to their amateurs and pupils: Holst with his Whitsuntide Singers, and his orchestra of Paulinas, Vaughan Williams with his Leith Hill Festival. Works such as Holst’s *St Paul’s* and *Brook Green* suites, and Vaughan Williams’s *Partita* (1948) and the above-mentioned *Concerto Grosso*, all seem to meet the requirements of the best light music, albeit in a different world to that of German and Grainger.¹³¹

Self goes on to paint the distinction between German and Coates’ focus on ‘the audience’ and Vaughan Williams and Holst’s interest in ‘the performer’:

Vaughan Williams’ *English Folk Song Suite* for military band (1923; also for orchestra) and Holst’s *Moorside Suite* for brass (1928) both needed to appeal to

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Self, *Light Music in Britain Since 1870* (London: Ashgate, 2001).

¹³¹ Self, 134.

those who were to play them. Here, perhaps, is the difference between the light music of German and Coates, and that of Vaughan Williams and Holst. The former aim at the audience, the latter – in their light music – at the performer.¹³²

Self examines the output of Holst and Vaughan Williams in detail and seems to give equal value to their respective contributions to British music. The following year (2002) a small change was seen, and a probing of the role the press plays in determining a composer's image. This idea was investigated by Meirion Hughes in *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music*.¹³³ Whilst Holst is only fleetingly mentioned (with three individual referenced works), Hughes's insight is that Holst's British image (and that of other composers) was significantly impacted by the impressions reviewers gave to the public. As one example, Henry Colles' appointment as chief critic for *The Times* took place in 1911, and he reviewed the *Beni Mora* suite in 1912 and *The Cloud Messenger* in 1913, leading to the opinion that Holst was inconsistent and questionable. On the one hand, Colles described *Beni Mora* as showing 'extraordinary skill', but the following year he wrote off the larger scaled *Cloud Messenger* as a failure. He wrote "one admired the sincerity and the big aim of the work, though one felt that Mr von Holst had not enough strength to carry it out."¹³⁴ While examining this opinion, Hughes himself labelled Holst both as an experimentalist composer grouped with Vaughan Williams, and later a 'fellow-pastoralist' next to him. This sentiment aligns with Abraham's views discussed above (from 1946)¹³⁵ with Holst being set aside and un-categorizable. Hughes continued his discussion on Holst next

¹³² Self, 134.

¹³³ Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹³⁴ Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914*, 63.

¹³⁵ Abraham, *British Music of Our Time*, 44.

from the viewpoint of Robin Legge, a critic with *The Telegraph*. In contrast to the *Beni Mora* review by Colles, Legge wrote:

Infinitely preferable would have been a rehearing of the same composer's *Somerset Rhapsody* – that is genuine all the way through. We do not ask for Biakra dancing-girls in Langham-Place, however clever their representation.¹³⁶

Legge represented the polarisation of opinion that would affect the reception of Holst's works - the *Somerset Rhapsody* is 'proper' English music, while *Beni Mora* is not for the good English sensibilities. Holst's exoticism in *Beni Mora* had seemingly come at the wrong time for a very popular reception from the critics, and wasn't heard in performance much after.

Holst's output is considered within the scope of an English 'national' music in *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940*.¹³⁷ Hughes and Stradling construct the chronology and circumstances of the development of an 'English' music by a specific group of composers centred on Ralph Vaughan Williams, while almost completely omitting Holst. They show the effects of critics and the reception of works citing the enormous success of Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. First performed in 1898, the choral cantata had registered over 200 performances in four years and made the composer famous both in England and America,¹³⁸ with the work becoming a staple in the repertoire of their choral societies. Given Holst's labelling as an 'experimental' composer using exotic themes and influences in his compositional writing, the success

¹³⁶ Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914*, 63.

¹³⁷ Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

¹³⁸ Hughes and Stradling, 235.

of a cantata dealing with the American Indians gaining such huge popularity has to come down to the popularity of Longfellow's poetry and, at least in part, to critical acclaim.¹³⁹

A clear theme emerges through almost every secondary-source text concerning English musical history – the 'renaissance' was mainly due to Ralph Vaughan Williams, with others more in the background. Holst is almost completely overshadowed on most occasions, and not even mentioned in 'others', compared to his renowned friend. This blanket theme serves to strengthen Abraham's views about Holst's polarizing effect on critics, and how his contribution to English music and the greater musical world will always remain in question because of it. With critics shooting down his works based on dislike for the general settings and Indian-influence used, and Vaughan Williams being championed as the "pastoralist" national composer of more substance and 'good old English tradition', the divide in opinion continued to plague Holst. Such startlingly different musical language and originality in his composition worked both for him with the brilliance of his compositions and unique timbres compared to others of the day, and against him in that 'different' music would be largely ignored or deflected in favour of a more appealing and publicly acceptable 'national' music.¹⁴⁰ Holst's social standing must also be taken into account when understanding how he was perceived next to other composers of the day. He taught at schools for a living, and composed in the time he could find outside of his teaching duties.¹⁴¹ This was quite opposite to the gentleman-composer profile that Vaughan Williams enjoyed. It would be naïve to think that

¹³⁹ The subject matter for Coleridge-Taylor was provided by Longfellow, which immediately brought cachet. This effect was seen with Holst's use of Whitman's words in the *Ode to Death*, which in turn was held up by Walker (1924) as "one of the chief landmarks of modern British music."

¹⁴⁰ Holst's constant use of Indian influences in works such as *Savitri* and the *Hymns from the Rig Veda*, did not help his cause in this regard, even though he also wrote "pastoral" style music, such as the *St. Paul's* suite. It is hardly surprising, then, that the more "English" works usually received a warmer welcome than others.

¹⁴¹ Colin Matthews, "Holst, Gustav," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13252> (accessed October 1, 2014).

Holst's primary teaching life did not impact on his acceptance and musical promotion.¹⁴² It certainly would have been easier for critics and audiences alike to accept Holst as *their* British composer if he had been in the same circumstances as Vaughan Williams – a gentleman from 'the Establishment', as opposed to a teacher – a mere functionary who had to earn wages for a living. Several other factors all would have contributed to the overall perception issues that Holst had to the greater public. He loathed reporters and attention, and had a reputation for avoiding the spotlight as much as possible. His Germanic-sounding name would also have been an issue, even though he dropped the 'von' during the war as many others had.

Christopher Scheer summarizes and laments Holst's depiction in the context of the modern-day British musical narrative:

Histories of twentieth-century British music have never done full justice to Gustav Holst. He is usually paired with Ralph Vaughan Williams by virtue of their long friendship and shared interest in English folksong, but because of Holst's premature death in 1934 and Vaughan William's long and distinguished career, the pairing is never one of equals. The major scholarly works that focus solely on Holst, written mostly by his daughter Imogen, portray him as a fumbler, a composer with great potential who was clumsily working towards his apotheosis, a symphony, when he was tragically cut down by illness. In general histories of British music, Holst's stylistic development is viewed as erratic, in contrast to that

¹⁴² Holst himself stated in his 1929 Yale lecture that: "... it is noticeable that the teacher is an object of derision amongst many writers of today. He is held up as being too pedantic in trifles and, above all, too fond of giving good advice. Personally I think this applies still more to the critics of teachers – people who have never done a day's teaching in their lives and therefore are able to criticize us more freely." "Holst's Lecture at Yale on the Teaching of Art 1929," in Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, Appendix, 151.

of Vaughan Williams, who, on the deaths of Elgar, Holst and Delius in 1934, became the doyen of British music history by the likes of Eric Blom, Frank Howes and Michael Trend, and even the revisionist history of Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling. His interests and associations seem at odds with the dominant tropes through which we understand British music of his time: nation, folksong, the 'pastoral,' and conservatism in the face of Continental developments. Some of the most relevant context for his art, such as England's literary and artistic avant-guard, occultism and Imperialism, are largely avoided, and as a result our understanding of Holst has suffered.¹⁴³

Scheer's insight underlines a critical point at the heart of this thesis – the historical injustice that perpetuates Holst's neglected status.¹⁴⁴ The jarring problem of being labelled a brilliant, original, genius on the one hand and all but overlooked when it comes to the important and influential historical chronicles on the other; will persist as more evidence unfolds over the following chapters of this investigation.

The attention paid to Holst in contemporary accounts from the 1920s to the 1950s is overwhelmingly positive, as not only do the writers acknowledge his importance in the development of an 'English' national music and use of folk elements, but more and more credit is given for the originality and creativity of his compositions.¹⁴⁵ The newspaper reviews and general opinion from that time (covered in the latter part of this chapter), tell a very different story to the one that is presented in the twenty-first century

¹⁴³ Christopher M. Scheer, "'A Direct and Intimate Realization': Holst and Formalism in the 1920's." In *British Music and Modernism 1895-1960*, edited by Matthew Riley (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 109-10.

¹⁴⁴ This also supports the views of Abraham discussed above.

¹⁴⁵ Such is this recognition that in 1985 when an 'English Masters' postage stamp series was produced, Holst was one of the four composers chosen, and for once, independently of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940*, 162.

through scholarly reflection regarding British music of the period. As Scheer notes however, as time has gone on, the reflections of the earlier accounts are ignored, and the musical legacy from the whole period encompassing Holst's lifetime has been simplified down to just one man – Vaughan Williams.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

It is immediately clear to see that given the evidence of public and critical opinion about Holst's works, and their performances, the reflections of Holst the composer given in contemporary historical accounts of the period were unfair and diminutive. The unapologetic neglect of Holst in British history and music texts largely contradicts the importance placed on him during the 1920s and 1930s in the media. Reviews and articles were reflecting on his contribution not only to an "English" music, but also important developments in genres such as opera, where his output was considered by reviewers the first worthy succession in English opera to Purcell's music. While acknowledged in many biographical sources as a good composer, the importance reflected in newspapers and journals did not translate into accounts of British musical history. At first glance, the central use of exoticism underlying most of his non-English folk contributions seems to be tragically out of place for the 'proper English consumption' to which so many seemed predisposed. It is also clear that *The Planets* brought Holst international fame and renown, and would ultimately be the standard against which all of his other compositional output was measured.

¹⁴⁶ Scheer, "A Direct and Intimate Realization," 110.

There is one thing that can be taken into the current Australian study, and that is that Holst did have a name as a ‘clever’ composer in England at the start of the 20th century. Whilst nowhere near as renowned as his close friend Ralph Vaughan Williams, or the stately Elgar, he was nonetheless slowly having his music performed beside these acknowledged masters. Holst was occasionally touted as a pioneer of ‘English’ music, with folk influences in many of his works by many ‘contemporary’ accounts from the turn of the century. While there is by no means a wealth of reviews of Holst’s music, there is sufficient material to analyse that adds an extra dimension for recreating the contemporary scene surrounding Holst’s ‘new’ music early in the twentieth century. Whilst reactions vary widely, there can be no doubt that more importance was given to Holst in the press than in the published books of the period.

How were Australians hearing ‘contemporary’ music?

Before turning to the main focus of this study in the following chapter, the Australian performance reception of Gustav Holst’s music in the first half of the twentieth century, a general overview of the Australian music scene of this period is provided to outline the previous musical experiences that audiences and critics alike were bringing to a concert hall when attending a performance of Holst’s works.¹⁴⁷

As the investigation into each of Holst’s works expands in the following chapters, it will be apparent that many names recur as the holders of key positions as Directors of Conservatoriums and Orchestras during the formative years of the century, and as they

¹⁴⁷ These experiences did not just include other concerts, but also musical recordings, broadcasts, as well as domestic music-making, where there were commonly two-piano arrangements of orchestral and popular works for amateur musicians to perform in the household.

forged ahead as the leading institutions and ensembles in Australia. The vast majority of these leading figures were British-born musicians with direct connections to the Royal College of Music in London and the educational hierarchy present in the British system of the time. These men and women would ultimately be responsible for the introduction and performance of many of Holst's works in Australia and their impact and contributions have been discussed more thoroughly in later chapters. Highlighting several here gives an indication of the extent of British influence on the Australian musical scene was in the first half of the twentieth-century. This will be a cursory overview of what is a rich and interesting story in its own right – the development of the various musical institutions and the establishment of entities such as the major State Symphony Orchestras, Conservatoriums, and others such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission. A more thorough examination would be a large-scale study in itself, but the purpose of outlining these key figures seeks to demonstrate the overarching influence the British music system had over the Australian colony of the period. Australians were being educated in music in what essentially was a British system. Repertoire that was being programmed was being done so by these musicians, many of whom who were also active in Europe. This all leads to an assumption that Australian audiences were 'tuned in' to the tonally based German symphonic school that dominated European music before and during the first half of the twentieth century.

The cultural centres of Australian music life in the first half of the twentieth century were indisputably located in Sydney and Melbourne. Examining the conservatoriums created in both places is essentially a study of the importation of British musicians to steer the musical development of the colony.

The New South Wales Conservatorium of Music saw a string of British and Continental leaders in the first half of the twentieth century. A brief overview of these Directors shows how Australia's leading music training institution was cast in a mould forged in England. Henri Verbrugghen (1873-1934), born and initially educated in Brussels was a passionate supporter of the continental-model of musical education and was appointed as the first Director of the between 1916 and 1921.¹⁴⁸ Next to take over was W. Arundel Orchard, who had begun teaching there in 1916, whom succeeded him as Director in 1923. Educated at Durham University, Orchard taught for a period at the St. Paul's School (where Holst taught) before relocating to Australia.¹⁴⁹ Orchard was succeeded by Edgar Bainton, a British born contemporary of Holst at the Royal College of Music was Director from 1934-1938, and was also active in the wider musical community, conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra on occasion.¹⁵⁰ Eugene Goossens (1893-1962) undertook his musical education in Bruges, Liverpool and finally the Royal College of Music. He was Director of the New South Wales Conservatorium between 1948-1955, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's first Chief Conductor during that same period.

The second half of the century saw a shift to a more Australian crop of Directors at the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, with Bernard Heinze (1957-1966), Joseph Post (1966-1971), Rex Hobcroft (1972-1982), and John Painter (1982-1985), who were all born in Australia.

¹⁴⁸ Roger Covell, "Sydney," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27231> (accessed August 22, 2015)

¹⁴⁹ John Carmody, "Orchard, Arundel," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43444> (accessed August 5, 2015).

¹⁵⁰ "Bainton, Edgar," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e754> (accessed September 25, 2014).

Examining Melbourne's Albert Street Conservatorium revealed much the same story. George Marshall-Hall (1862-1915) relocated from Britain to Australia in 1891 as the first Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne, also founding his "Marshall-Hall" Orchestra the following year. His strong personality and forthright views brought about a fallout which led to his tenure being discontinued in 1900. He withdrew and established his own Conservatorium as a rival to the University of Melbourne – the Albert Street Conservatorium, established in 1901.¹⁵¹ Fritz Hart – a close friend and contemporary of Holst at the Royal College of Music – succeeded Marshall-Hall in 1914, and expanded the enterprise with the help of prominent artists such as Nellie Melba, who established a singing school there. Shortly thereafter the Albert Street Conservatorium was renamed to the Melba Conservatorium. Hart was also appointed as permanent conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra from 1927-1937, a post he would share with Bernard Heinze for a period.¹⁵²

Aside from the state symphony orchestras and conservatoria, there were many smaller ensembles and musical societies attached to universities and in the community. Many of these were strong advocates for the advancement of British music in Australia – most notably the British Music Societies in Melbourne and Sydney – and these will be explored in later chapters.

Australians Abroad

¹⁵¹ Marshall-Hall studied in Berlin but like so many others, ended up at the Royal College of Music in London, and gathered considerable experience at Oxford Military College, Newton and Wellington Colleges before in 1888 directing the London Organ School and College of Music. Thérèse Radic, "Marshall-Hall, George W.L.," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/17868> (accessed August 20, 2015).

¹⁵² Anne-Marie Forbes, "Hart, Fritz," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12463> (accessed August 27, 2015).

The dominance of the British musicians previously discussed was augmented by several Australians in and around the key positions in musical society. Consideration about how “Australian” their methods and educational grounding was warrants examination before labelling the influence they would have in the country as nationalistically ‘Australian.’ Nellie Melba received some training in Australia, but departed for Europe shortly after her debut in Melbourne in 1884 to study in Paris with Mathilde Marchesi before embarking on a hugely successful international career in Europe and America. Her input in to the Melba Conservatorium was undoubtedly tempered with her European and American experience.¹⁵³

Bernard Heinze, whilst born in the Australian state of Victoria, studied at the Royal College of Music in London from 1911, spending five post-war years in the Royal Artillery. In 1920 he won a scholarship and went to Paris to study at the Schola Cantorum and later completed a short time in Berlin with Willy Hess. With this experience and continental grounding, Heinze made a significant impact in Victoria in various ensembles, prominently conducting the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (later the Victorian Symphony Orchestra). Arguably his biggest impact on the musical life of Australia was in his roles as director-general to the Australian Broadcasting Company between 1929-1932 and music advisor to the Australian Music Commission which succeeded it. Heinze was the first Australian musician to be knighted in 1949, and served as the Director of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music from 1957-1966.

¹⁵³ Jon Tolansky, "Melba, Dame Nellie," *The Oxford Companion to Music*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e4336> (accessed August 31, 2015).

Australian music of the period leading up to and during the time focused on in this study was inevitably entangled with British music, essentially the only outcome of having the British elite assuming so many key positions in musical society in Australia, and having Australia's emerging artists primarily educated in Britain and Europe.¹⁵⁴ They noted that the century of art and music leading up to 1900 was entirely dependent on European culture, primarily that of Britain. The first decades of the twentieth century saw more interest in an Australian national musical identity, with advocates such as Henry Tate (1873-1926) proposing that composers should base their music around Australian birdcall, while Percy Grainger (1882-1961) suggested that they ought to examine the music of Asia and the South Pacific for inspiration. Australian composers would explore both avenues later in the century with the emergence of a distinct national voice, however, as outlined previously, in the target period of this study Australians were quite British in their musical sensibilities and would have heard the new British music of Holst and others with their ears tuned to the standard orchestral repertoire being presented in England. From this standpoint, the exploration of Holst's musical reception in Australia can begin.

¹⁵⁴ Laughton Harris and John Borwick, "Australia," *The Oxford Companion to Music*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e489> (accessed August 3, 2015).

Chapter 3 – *The Planets*

Holst's iconic *The Planets* Suite is far and away the composer's most popular work, and has more scholarly attention paid to it than almost the rest of the composer's output combined. The interest it has attracted has conferred a significant benefit to this thesis as the investigations undertaken by others into the genesis, performance history, and reception of *The Planets* in Britain provides a more substantial base with which to compare issues surrounding the reception of the work in Australia. Where Imogen Holst's accounts have been the most thorough on her father's life, Richard Greene's *Holst: The Planets* stands as the most comprehensive study on the work, containing a wealth of information regarding the critical reception of the work in Britain. Greene's work included a chart noting every review found from all publications for the first performances,¹ as well as analytical segments on each movement.² At the time of writing, another prominent Holst scholar, Raymond Head, released what the title claims as new work on this famous piece. The pre-release review suggests that this book focused on *The Planets*,³ provides a detailed background into its inception as well as a discussion on the premiere performance and the subsequent reaction.⁴ These two studies compliment Imogen Holst's discussion of her father's most popular work,⁵ but such is the unquestionable pairing between work and composer that it is rare to find any mention of Holst in any source without *The Planets* mentioned immediately following. For this reason *The Planets* is presented as

¹ See Appendix 1 for Greene's chart.

² Richard Greene, *Holst: The Planets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³ Raymond Head, *Gustav Holst: The Planets Suite - New Light on a Famous Work* (Oxfordshire: Sky Dance Press, 2014).

⁴ Another work of interest to 'Planets' scholars may be the analytical thesis from Kanokrut Leelasiri, "An Analysis of Gustav Holst's 'The Planets'," (Masters Thesis, California State University, Northridge, 2001).

⁵ The work is discussed in most of her output regarding her father, but the most concentrated focus is found in Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 41-53.

the flagship work for this Australian study. While many reviews are found for Holst's other works performed in both Britain and Australia, there is little to no scholarly attention paid to them in comparison to what has become one of the most recorded works of the 20th century.

Description of the work

The Planets is universally acknowledged as the work that brought Gustav Holst international acclaim as a composer after the first public performance in 1920. This extra fanfare of the strong and immediate reaction from audiences and critics alike might seem obviously desirable, but it was very much to the dismay of the composer. Holst did not cope well with being the centre of attention, and was well known for reacting with an entirely different persona when confronted by reporters from the press (he did not interview well, and resented reporters attempting to get photographs).⁶ He also chose to turn down many offers of Honorary Doctorates throughout the remainder of his life, preferring to instead quietly go about his composing in his heated music-room at the St. Paul's Girls School in London.⁷ Holst's lack of 'commercial charisma' with the press undoubtedly contributed to the overall image of the composer portrayed to his contemporary public – he certainly was not playing the part of gentleman-

⁶ "He was the despair of photographers and press reporters on the rare occasions when they managed to make their way through the carefully guarded double doors of his music room... Hundreds of chance acquaintances had found Holst extraordinarily easy to get on with, but when he was faced with a reporter he would scowl through his spectacles and close himself up in a glum, forbidding silence." Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 29.

⁷ The portrait Imogen Holst presents of her father focused on his intense dislike of attention. Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst*, 84-90.

composer that the British public expected and placed on a pedestal with the likes of an Elgar or his close friend Vaughan Williams.⁸

If you ask the average person in the twenty-first century if they have heard of the composer Holst, if they recognized the name at all, a likely response would be: “He wrote *The Planets*, right?” Sadly, for most people (even many orchestral musicians), Gustav Holst is posthumously linked with just a single work - and this has been to the detriment of the rest of his compositional output. There are few (if any) twentieth-century works that have been recorded more since the invention of the medium and it remains today a heavily programmed work around the world.

Holst conducted the London Symphony Orchestra for the first four recordings made of *The Planets*. The first three produced were excerpts and acoustic recordings made in 1922, 1923 and 1925 (“Jupiter” was the first recorded in 1922, and was re-recorded alongside “Saturn” in 1925, replacing the previous version in the catalogue). The complete suite was recorded in 1926 over four sessions, and electronically recorded, replacing the previous version recorded between 1922-1925, while retaining the old catalogue numbers.⁹ It was noted in Philip Stuart’s comprehensive 938-page work *The LSO Discography* that it was at this point in time acoustic recording was superseded by electronic recording, meaning Holst’s *Planets* suite was among the first electronically recorded works in London. Albert Coats then recorded “Mars,” “Mercury,” “Jupiter,” and “Uranus” the same year for HMV with the London

⁸ In the 21st century it has become standard fare for leading musical lights to have publicists, media advisers, image enhancers and style coaches. Even though not fashionable in Holst’s time, he did not help his own cause in this respect with his inherent distaste for the press and publicity.

⁹ Philip Stuart, *The LSO Discography – The World’s Most Recorded Orchestra*, CHARM - AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music, 2009, <http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/download/download.html> (accessed August 10, 2014).

Symphony, although it was listed merely as the “Symphony Orchestra” for contractual reasons. There were then three further recordings made in the 1940s, one of which being the first of five recordings of *The Planets* by Sir Adrian Boult.¹⁰ These recordings, combined with the BBC broadcasting of his most popular work would no doubt have been influential in making his name known (particularly as Holst himself did not help his own cause through his personal dealings with the press). Vaughan Williams recalled an anecdote on the effectiveness of reaching listeners through broadcasting that might not be able to attend concerts in London or other major centres:

A naval officer was once visiting a lonely station on the Yorkshire coast inhabited only by a storekeeper and his wife. ‘You must be very lonely here,’ he said.

‘Yes, we depend a lot on our wireless.’

‘What do you enjoy most on the wireless?’

‘Beethoven and Holst.’¹¹

The popularity extended to the tune Holst used in the Andante Maestoso section from “Jupiter,” which he utilized when setting Cecil Spring Rice’s poem *I Vow to Thee, My Country*.¹²

¹⁰ There were four more recordings in the 1950s, four in the 1960, fifteen in the 1970s, eighteen in the 1980s and so on. If the Gustav Holst Discography on the *Discogs* website (<http://www.discogs.com/artist/335760-Gustav-Holst?query=the%20planets>, accessed September 3 2014 – containing a list and links to each recorded version of the work) is to be believed, there are currently 225 different releases of Holst’s most popular work.

¹¹ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, ed. David Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 301.

¹² Gustav Holst, *I Vow to Thee, My Country* (London: Curwen, 1921).



Figure 3.1 – The tune from “Jupiter” used in *I Vow to Thee, My Country*.

Imogen Holst revealed that the decision to do so was due to Holst’s deteriorated condition from overwork. She relayed the immeasurable effect of pride and association the tune captured (having a life of its own) while still in the context of a performance of *The Planets*:

It is impossible to prevent an aura of patriotism from hovering over a large section of the audience at this moment in *The Planets*: backs become visibly straighter, minds that may have been wandering in a maze of flippant irrelevancies come to attention with a shock and prepare themselves for what they consider to be an appropriate state of reverence.

Regardless of this appropriated nationalism, which provoked a sense of disappointment for Imogen Holst,¹³ the resulting hymn has gone on to become the unofficial anthem of Britain, still prevalent today.¹⁴

¹³ Imogen Holst also showed her own disdain for how the tune had been picked up and adopted to engender nationalistic pride: “unfortunately it is nearly always associated with the hymn,” and in relation to the tune’s effect of sparking reverence “alas, nothing could be less appropriate. The abrupt breaking off and the frivolous wood-wind are enough to prove that when Holst first wrote that tune he had no idea there would ever be anything solemn about it.” Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 46.

¹⁴ The extent of the popularity of the hymn is called upon when used as the opening to Tony Palmer’s 2011 documentary *Holst – In the Bleak Mid Winter*, demonstrating many examples from different musical idioms showing Holst’s tune transcending nationalistic and cultural barriers. Weird and wonderful instrumental combinations and singing styles, appear as well as many examples of its use on stately occasions. To add to that, many people with no knowledge of Holst, quite likely know the tune

Holst became distressed that the suite's popularity was diverting attention away from his other works and while his own preference was for *Saturn*, he did not think that much of *The Planets* suite as a whole.¹⁵ This kind of response not only underlines his quiet, reflective nature but also confirms his well-known hatred of public attention. Whilst the bigger and more 'flashy' *Jupiter* and *Mars* movements captivated the public and are found almost without exception in performances where only several movements are selected,¹⁶ Holst took away the satisfaction of the creation of something special in *Saturn*, one of the more under-appreciated movements by the general public.¹⁷ Nonetheless, it is *The Planets* that cemented Holst on the international stage, and secured his legacy as a composer.

In the early 1920s in England, no one would have gone to the premiere of a new orchestral suite such as *The Planets* knowing what lay ahead of them – the effects of such new harmonic language against the backdrop and familiarity of the firmly embedded German symphonic school and the more recently popular English pastoral sound of which Vaughan Williams was heralded as the representative.¹⁸ The modern advantage of having access to so much varied music (with access to music from every corner of the globe now only a click away) and the easy repetition of this music with

well – it has even breached a cultural and inter-generational threshold with its use in the exceptionally popular video game *Sid Meyers: Civilization V* (Fireaxis Games, 2011). The game requires the user to choose a nation to control. If the user selects England, the game opens with an arrangement of the famous tune *I Vow to Thee, My Country*. The hymn has undeniably progressed to the point of being representative and stereotypically British.

¹⁵ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 53.

¹⁶ A glance at many of the reviews in Britain and Australia relays this view, as does the programming of concerts where only a selection of movements is presented – there is always one presented, but usually both.

¹⁷ Imogen Holst relayed "Holst never considered *The Planets* was one of his best works, and it distressed him when it became a popular success. But he liked *Saturn* [*sic*], and he was glad to have learnt so much from having written the other movements." Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 53.

¹⁸ Well established British composers of the previous generation such as Elgar were viewed as part of this compositional school, and from an audience standpoint, it was very much the norm. Looking at the discussions on the development of British music at the time (see Pratt, Abraham, and Walker in Chapter 2), it is clear that Vaughan Williams was the poster-boy for the development of this movement.

constant access to music files on phones and computers, challenges our ability to place ourselves in the shoes – and ears – of Holst’s contemporary audiences. The music critic Stephen Johnson captured this idea well in an interview used in Tony Palmer’s 2011 documentary on Holst,¹⁹ giving an insight into the new language Holst explored through the opening page of the first ‘movement’ “Mars” when he explained:

It’s very, very important to remember that at the time Holst began writing, modern music, for the vast majority of people who cared about it in this country [Britain], was Elgar – maybe also Richard Strauss. For an audience coming along and hearing the beginning of *The Planets*, it’s difficult for us to sense just how extraordinarily new this must have sounded. You just take a look at the score; at every single element on the first page Holst is asking each instrument to do something which is quite unlike what anybody would have expected at the time... First of all there was this famous rhythm (rhythmic motive of “Mars”), and there you are he has the timpani playing it –fair enough – but he asks them to play it with wooden sticks instead of the usual sponge sticks so it was a dry, harsh, sharp sound. Then he asks the violins to play the same rhythm *col legno* – that is, turn the bow around and hit it with the back of the bow, the wood – so you get this very imprecise tonal sound; this clicking sort of skeletal, bony kind of sound. Then he asks something even more extraordinary of the harps. Harps normally in romantic music have this liquid airy sound but what Holst is going for here is something incredibly metallic. Now one thing you can’t do on a harp... is play rapidly repeating notes – so he has each harp dovetail so one of them goes (rhythmic motive starting on the low note of octave) and the other one

¹⁹ Tony Palmer, *Holst – In the Bleak Midwinter* (DVD, Tony Palmer, 2011).

goes (same motive but inverted) so they overlap each other so the ear hears something that is technically impossible which is two harps (playing the rhythmic and tonal motive together) and it would have been a very dry, metallic, bell like sound – not the kind of thing you normally associate with a harp. Put all these together, add something else – a quiet roll on the gong sustained in the background. Gongs were not unknown in the music of the time, but they were usually for that big J. Arthur Rank effect or the quiet ‘death-chord’ at the end of Tchaikovsky’s ‘Pathetic’ symphony. But here Holst asks for very, very quiet – so you are just aware of this sound almost like radio interference in the background. It’s not just the pure sound of this that is so extraordinary as well – it’s the tempo, or rather the meter. Holst asks for the beginning of “Mars” to be played in five-four – five beats to the bar, and yet it’s clearly a march. Who marches in five beats to a bar? It is all part of this extraordinary inhumanity that he is trying to create, the sound of something mechanical, something inhuman marching here. And things in five-four... were still pretty unusual in English music – even in 1914.²⁰

This description given by Stephen Johnson looks at the construction of certain elements of the movement in some detail, but what contemporary audiences were turning up at concerts and actually *hearing* is difficult to picture. Indeed, Richard Greene opens his chapter on the British reception of the work stating, “It is hard today to imaging the impact of the language of *The Planets* on its original audience.”²¹ Luckily, a first-hand account from Rosamund Gurney, a member of the ladies choir

²⁰ Music critic Stephen Johnson’s discussion on *The Planets* suite, in Tony Palmer, *Holst – In the Bleak Midwinter*.

²¹ Greene, *The Planets*, 30.

that performed in the public premiere at the Queen's Hall of *The Planets* has survived, shedding some light on the matter through this first-hand account:

I'd never heard his [Holst's] music before, and of course in those days it was very modern, and to us full of discords. And when we did the rehearsal, I must say I didn't like it very much because it sounded ALL discords and as if everybody was singing out of tune. But when we came to the concert itself, and I heard the whole thing 'in total' so to speak, it was absolutely magnificent. I then realised... I sort of appreciated... At the same time this little man, I did wonder how on Earth he ever came to write anything like "Mars" for instance, which is one of the noisiest pieces of music I believe ever written, how he could of produced that.²²

While this account may have represented a slightly skewed view of this new sound, the chorister was musically trained and in a choir that performed the commonly heard and newer music at British concerts; the non-musically educated general public would have heard this new 'discordant' harmony from an even more tonally expectant perspective. If a musician like Rosamund Gurney was a little baffled by the harmonies used, some of the musical devices Holst employed in the suite would have sounded fantastical to the public's unconditioned ears. Her account also describes Holst's use of the choir at the suite's conclusion in "Neptune":

For "Neptune," we really were supposed to be voices in the far distance – we were supposed to be mermaids! And we weren't seen, we sang behind the stage,

²² Palmer, *Holst - in the Bleak Midwinter*.

at the back and we didn't sing words we just sang to "ahhhh." And as it finishes, towards the end, the voices get quieter and quieter and they die away and that's the end of the whole work. And what happened was we slowly walked out of the building while someone very, very slowly closed the door.²³

This musical effect of a dying ethereal sound of the women's choir fading away with no instrumental accompaniment must have been almost startling to the contemporary ear after what came before it. Whilst other English composers such as Delius and Vaughan Williams used the effect of a women's chorus in their music, Gurney's account clearly shows Holst's effect was new and exciting. Imogen Holst's recounting of the scene at the September 29 1918 private performance put on by Balfour Gardiner reinforces Gurney's account:

But it was the end of *Neptune [sic]* that was unforgettable, with its hidden chorus of women's voices growing fainter and fainter in the distance, until the imagination knew no difference between sound and silence. They were singing:



Those two chords are now common property, but they came to birth in *Neptune*, and for that one moment they opened the doors on an unknown world.²⁴

²³ Palmer, *Holst - in the Bleak Midwinter*.

²⁴ Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 59.

Greene's opening sentence then - "It is hard today to imaging the impact of the language of *The Planets* on its original audience" - is accurate. Contemporary music today is heard by listeners who have already been exposed to the dramatic shift in harmonic language provided by the twentieth century - we cannot imagine what that British audience at the Queen's Hall made of the sound they heard. This was clearly music that not only stunned the contemporary ear, but also left it wanting more.

Overview of the British Reception of *The Planets*

With Richard Greene's detailed chapter on the British reception of *The Planets* suite, a very accurate picture of the reception of the three initial public performances emerges.²⁵ After the private performance put on by Balfour Gardiner on September 29, 1918, public performances containing several movements were given (February 27 and November 22 1919) before the premiere of the full suite on October 10, 1920.²⁶ Of the thirty-seven different publications included in Greene's compilation of reviews,²⁷ fifty-four reviews were found for these four performances.²⁸ Twenty-seven reviews were deemed 'positive' or 'very positive,' seven 'neutral,' fourteen 'negative' or 'very negative' and six 'mixed' reviews.²⁹ Greene noted that several papers that initially gave a negative review for one or more of the partial performances (that is,

²⁵ As well as the full premiere on November 15, 1920.

²⁶ See Appendix 1 – Richard Greene's analysis of reviews for *The Planets*.

²⁷ Including the major newspapers, other local newspapers, and various periodicals.

²⁸ Of course, some of these reviews came from regional and small-town papers that would have had a tiny readership in comparison with the main London papers. Greene covered this none-the-less, and they will duly be counted here.

²⁹ Five reviews on Greene's chart were given two rating (eg O/M) – the lower, or more negative score was counted in these five cases.

any performance that used only several of the movements) went on to give a more positive review of the full suite. It is also mentioned that two particular journals, *Sackbut* and *Truth*, which both gave “extremely negative” reviews, gave bitter accounts of the audience reaction from the same performance,³⁰ distressed that the gathered audience would give such acclaim to an extent as to “make one utterly despair of the future of music in this country.”³¹ Even these scathing reviewers reported that the audience reacted “with tumultuous applause that far eclipsed in volume and intensity that which was accorded to such a superlative masterpiece as the *Totentanz* of Liszt, so magnificently rendered earlier the same evening by Siloti.”³² What we see here is an assessment from an individual clinging to their ‘proper’ distinction of ‘worthy music.’ Clearly Holst’s noise was distressing to these critics, but seems almost secondary to the despair brought about by the fact that others liked what they were hearing.

Referring to Greene’s chart,³³ it is clear that the public, and most critics, embraced *The Planets* after the full suite was heard on November 15, 1920 concert. The result of this was the international launch of Holst, and the suite to prominence. Greene aptly noted:

As a celestial body, the suite was a “supernova,” its effulgence heralding a quick decline. Between 1921 and 1926, Holst collected reviews for seventy-five performances in England. There were many others on the Continent and in the

³⁰ Peter Warlock edited *Sackbut*, and scathing criticism was dished out regularly and not just contained to Holst – this heavily weighted opinion needs to be weighed, especially when in the context of bitterly opposing the great reaction afforded the performance when the majority of other critical assessment disagree with the *Sackbut* stance.

³¹ Greene, *Holst: The Planets*, 36.

³² Greene, *Holst: The Planets*, 36.

³³ See Appendix 1.

USA. Two recordings were made during this time, and many of Holst's other compositions were revived.³⁴

Comparing *The Planets* with a supernova was a poetic touch, with the performances seeing a 'quick decline.' This last point is particularly interesting – that Holst's other works, both past and present at that time – received a bump in popularity as the result of being composed by the same man who produced *The Planets*.

The Planets received universal acclaim in British performances up until the composer's death in 1934. It was rare to hear the suite performed in full, with some of the more popular movements such as "Mars," "Jupiter," "Venus," and "Mercury" performed in different combinations to fill programs that had other centerpieces.³⁵

This was noted by Edwin Evans in the third edition of *Groves* (1927), who in the entry on Holst noted of *The Planets* that "it is still rarely performed in its entirety, but groups of from three to five of its sections appear in orchestral programmes."³⁶

This work was immediately recognized as an original and significant contribution to both English music and the orchestral canon. While it was not until long after the composer's death that *The Planets* began to gain momentum in the frequency of complete performances, it did receive significant attention from its premiere onwards - particularly when compared to most other contemporary compositions. Whilst Holst's

³⁴ Greene, *Holst: The Planets*, 37.

³⁵ A review at the time of Holst's death noted this chop and change approach to programming *The Planets*, stating "As the whole takes nearly an hour and there is no reason beyond effective contrast why the numbers should be played in sequence, programme-makers have got into the habit of picking out the more popular numbers to fill odd corners of their schemes. We are not likely often to hear *The Planets* complete." BBC Symphony Concert – Holst and Scriabin, *The Times*, November 1, 1934, 12.

³⁶ Edwin Evans, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 3rd Ed. Vol. 2, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1927), 659.

output was already quite significant, it was *The Planets* that cemented his worth as an English composer. No critic could bring himself or herself to say otherwise now, even those who questioned his worth prior to what is popularly regarded as his masterpiece.

Australian Performance History

The discussion to this point has contributed to familiarity with the British life of Holst's most popular work *The Planets*. Using this impression as the central context an examination of the famous suite and its performance history in Australia can now be tackled with context. First, an overview of all the performances found is given in the table below (see figure 3.2).³⁷

³⁷ Individual movements are denoted as follows: Me – Mercury, M – Mars, V – Venus, J – Jupiter, the Full complete performance of *The Planets*, - 'Full' and a complete performance reduced on two pianos - '2 Pianos'.

Date	Year	State	Group	Conductor	Full/ Myts
June 19	1925	NSW	British Music Society	William James and Harold Elvins	2 Piano
December 2	1925	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	W.A. Orchard	Full
March 31	1926	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	W.A. Orchard	Full
August 21	1926	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	W.A. Orchard	V, J
March 14	1928	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	Alfred Hill	Full
August 10	1929	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	W.A. Orchard	V, J
December 6	1929		Foreign Radio Broadcast		Full
May 15	1935	NSW	New South Wales State Orchestra	Edgar Bainton	J
October 17	1936	VIC	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	Malcolm Sargent	M, J
July 17	1948	VIC	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	Joseph Post	Me, V, M, J
August 4	1951	NSW	New South Wales State Orchestra	Joseph Post	Me, V, M, J
September 27	1952	VIC	Unspecified	Unspecified	Me, V, M, J

Figure 3.2 – Australian Performance History of *The Planets* Suite.

The first mention of *The Planets* made in Australia was in Melbourne's paper *The Argus* in 1925, discussing the Victorian Orchestral League and the expansion of their work. In the brief coverage given, the discussion focused on a gift of £500 donated over three years to extend the work of the League, and Mr. Alberto Zelman stated that Holst's *Planets* suite would "probably be produced this year for the first time in Australia."³⁸ It was not until November of that year that *The Planets* proper is discussed in the media. Surprisingly, this news is seen in Perth (given the remoteness on the west coast of the country from the musical centres of Sydney and Melbourne),³⁹ with *The West Australian* mentioning that a performance is to be given in New South Wales by the Sydney Conservatorium under W. Arundel Orchard (then director of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music) with a lecture in which he discussed the score ahead of the Australian premiere. Such was the interest that the reviewer reflected "The small hall, in which this lecture was delivered, was crowded – in fact, so many were anxious to attend that it is probable that had the main hall been available for the purpose, it would have been filled."⁴⁰ There was no shortage of interest in the lecture for what was clearly a much-anticipated Australian debut. The article continued, explaining "Mr Orchard's clear exposition of the themes, and his graphic description of the scope of 'The Planets,' proved of great value to those to whom the work was unknown." There were two more preview announcements of the premiere in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, which both stated "The Conservatorium Orchestra, conducted by Mr. W. Arundel Orchard, will give... the first performance in Australia of Gustav Holst's 'The Planets,' an orchestral work which has created great interest in

³⁸ "Work of Orchestral League," *The Argus*, March 14, 1925, 27.

³⁹ "Music," *The West Australian*, November 7, 1925, 15.

⁴⁰ "The Planets - Lecture by Mr. Orchard," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 26, 1925, 10.

England and America.”⁴¹ Outlining the ‘great interest’ almost seemed to be leading the reader towards a state of anticipation.⁴² The previews described all of the movements and their titles, as well as the rest of the programme that included the overture to the *Meistersinger* and a Mendelssohn Symphony.

The first time the complete suite was heard was in two-piano form, was in a British Music Society concert given on June 19, 1925. The pianists were William James and Harold Elvins, performing the arrangement by Nora Day and Valley Lasker, which was published by F & B Goodwin in 1923.⁴³ The premiere performance of *The Planets* in Australia was given at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music under the baton of Arundel Orchard on Wednesday December 2, 1925. Reviews of this performance appeared the next day in *The Sydney Morning Herald*,⁴⁴ with an abbreviated version appearing in *The Argus* in Victoria.⁴⁵ The opening statement of the Sydney newspaper’s review captured the anticipation surrounding the premiere, stating the work “naturally drew a packed house,” and that “the Sydney production of this work... was among the eagerly awaited events of the musical year.” The review continued with the explanation “that Sydney has now had the opportunity of hearing ‘The Planets’ in its full orchestral colour is due... to the kindly offices of Mrs. James Dyer of Melbourne, in placing the score at the disposal of Mr. W. Arundel Orchard.” Louise Hanson-Dyer had established a library of British music in Victoria, and personally corresponded with Holst from time to time.⁴⁶ Imogen Holst would later

⁴¹ “Amusements -The Planets,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 28, 1925, 14, and “Amusements - The Planets,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 2, 1925, 9.

⁴² What today may be described as building ‘hype’ for the work.

⁴³ Daniela Kaleva, “Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer's Patronage of Gustav Holst,” *Context: Journal of Music Research*, no. 37 (2012): 77-91.

⁴⁴ “The Planets - First Production in Australia,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 3, 1925, 15.

⁴⁵ “The Planets - Production in Sydney,” *The Argus*, December 3, 1925, 12.

⁴⁶ Jim Davidson, *Lyrebird Rising* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 88.

credit Louise Hanson-Dyer for her part in the Australian premiere in her father's biography, recounting "I was in Paris... at a party given by Mrs. Louise Dyer, the founder of the Lyre-Bird Press, who had introduced *The Planets* into Australia and had given a complete set of Holst's scores to the library at Melbourne."⁴⁷ The reception of the audience was reported, with an enthusiastic reception prompting applause resulting in a repetition of the final movement. The review went into detail of each movement and its successful execution by the performers, but the overall musical content provided by Holst was surmised: "while adhering to traditional form in this score, he [Holst] manifests the utmost originality and imaginative power in building up his marvelous series of tone-pictures." Questions of quality of performances affecting reception are addressed with the critic outlining that although there was little time for the suite to be rehearsed, the orchestra performed admirably. After much exploration of each movement, the extensive review concluded, "'The Planets' may be described, in its strength, command of rhythm, and colour, as one of the most notable compositions of the new British School."⁴⁸ The focus was clearly on the new and exciting work from Britain – with only one line accounting for the rest of the program added at the end.⁴⁹

The next performance of *The Planets* was given several months later, on the 31 March 1926. The Sydney premiere, four months earlier was seen as such a success that the new season preview in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on the morning of this next

⁴⁷ Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst: A Biography*, 149.

⁴⁸ The review also commented that "last night's performance revealed the inadequacy of any piano adaptation, such as was recently heard when a setting of part of the work was given on two pianos at a British Music Society's concert." A programme or review of this British Music Society concert was not found, but the critic who had obviously attended relays the underwhelming representation of the suite in piano reproductions in comparison to the full orchestral realization.

⁴⁹ The very prompt: "Mendelssohn's 'Scottish' Symphony and the 'Mastersingers' [sic] Overture were also played."

performance highlighted that the Conservatorium Orchestra would open its next season of subscription concerts and “mark the occasion by a repetition of Gustav Holst’s ‘Planets,’ which excited so much interest upon its first performance.”⁵⁰ The review in the following day’s newspaper confirms the reception of the premiere the previous December, noting “on this repetition... the imaginative power, variety, and originality of the score made once more a convincing impression.”⁵¹ The review discussed (briefly this time) each movement, with an overwhelming conclusion that a subsequent hearing has strengthened the memory of the positive aspects of the work, and has now justified and convinced its worth to any who were unsure after the first hearing: “After a second hearing, one is confirmed in his view of the lightness and grace of ‘Mercury,’ the bluff and boisterous merriment of ‘Jupiter,’ and the serenity of ‘Saturn’ ...”⁵² This review did not let the entire work escape unscathed – it questioned the meaning of the military march in “Uranus” among other ‘vague’ moments, but on the whole it reinforced the highly positive reviews that came before. A good judgment of how Holst’s music was being received can be seen by the amount of people wanting to hear it, reflected on in the review that stated, “A great crowd was attracted by this second chance of hearing *The Planets*.” The suite had clearly made an impact on the Sydney music scene.

Several movements of *The Planets* were given later the same year, on August 21 at a children’s concert, once more from the Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra under W. Arundel Orchard. It was reviewed the following Monday.⁵³ While not much was said about the reception of the performance (apart from that the pre-concert talk and the

⁵⁰ “Amusements - The Planets,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 31, 1926, 10.

⁵¹ “Conservatorium Orchestral Concert - The Planets,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 1, 1926, 16.

⁵² The wording of this review strongly suggests that this was the same critic from the premiere performance.

⁵³ “Conservatorium – Children’s Concert,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 23, 1926, 7.

musical content was equally as interesting to the adults as the children), the review mentions information on Arundel Orchard's correspondence with Holst about the work.⁵⁴

After such a successful initial run of *The Planets* from late 1925 to mid-1926, there was a break until early 1928 for its next performance, once more by the Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra. The season preview was covered in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Like the 1926 season opener, the 1928 season would "in the first place... include a performance of Gustav Holst's great work, 'The Planets,' which created so much discussion when it was first presented here two years ago."⁵⁵ The Conservatorium Orchestra was also exploring other contemporary British works at this time too – with Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* included in the season.⁵⁶

A slightly 'recycled' opening concert of the season (in that both *The Planets* and Beethoven's Eighth Symphony were also played at the season opener in 1926) was given with Alfred Hill conducting (as the usual conductor, W. Arundel Orchard, was away overseas), on March 14, 1928.⁵⁷ A small preview note,⁵⁸ and a more expansive

⁵⁴ "In introducing the two sections of "The Planets" – "Venus" and "Jupiter," both well played – Mr Orchard stated that the composer of the work, Gustav Holst, in a letter to him, had made the interesting comment that, while only three performances of the complete work had been given outside the United Kingdom, the third of these, and the first outside of the United Kingdom, took place in Australia. This, of course, was the production in Sydney by Mr Orchard and the Conservatorium Orchestra."

⁵⁵ "Music and Drama - The Conservatorium Orchestra," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 25, 1928, 12.

⁵⁶ This preview noted the *Sea Symphony* was a "work which has been some time in coming to Australia, since it was first produced at the Leeds Festival in 1920, and has rapidly gained in popularity abroad during that time."

⁵⁷ Alfred Hill (1869-1960) was a composer, and was among the first professors at the newly formed New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music, later its orchestra's deputy conductor under Verbrugghen. He was a prominent figure in musical circles in Sydney, and even held the post of President of the Composers' Society of Australia. Andrew D. McCredie, "Hill, Alfred Francis," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hill-alfred-francis-6667/text11495> (accessed October 2, 2014).

preview of the concert planned for the following week appeared in the newspaper.⁵⁹

The review the day after the performance noted:

The Holst work, 'The Planets,' included in the programme in response to many requests, impressed the crowded audience by its vigor and spacious demonstraviness [sic] no less that by its imaginative power...Last night the breadth of descriptive style, the clashing dissonances, the variety and freedom of treatment of the work, again excited warm applause.⁶⁰

Clearly, *The Planets* was received by the audiences in Australia with open arms and ears. The statement that it was included in another season opener "in response to many requests" speaks volumes for a new work. Audiences had spoken, and praise Holst's *Planets* suite was universal. There was no hesitation, which was rare given that the run of performances of any of Holst's works in Britain, had always met with at least some resistance. The wording used by the critic – particularly the repeated mentioning of 'imaginative power' of *The Planets* – point to the conclusion that the same critic had attended all of the performances to date and was speaking from a perspective of a continuous experience. This point in 1928 was pivotal for *The Planets* in Australia. To date there had been two complete performances, great reviews and reported packed audiences who were demanding to hear the work again. However, from here through to the 1950s – another two decades – no other complete performance was produced. The well-versed 'highlights' were performed on occasion, as was the trend documented in the British performance history of the work –

⁵⁸ "Conservatorium Orchestra," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 3, 1928, 14.

⁵⁹ "Music and Drama - Conservatorium Orchestra," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 10, 1928, 12.

⁶⁰ "Conservatorium – Orchestral Concert," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 15, 1928, 12.

seemingly counter-intuitive given the initial reception *The Planets* received in Australia – this time an Antipodean Supernova.

The final performance found in the 1920s was a performance of “Venus” and “Jupiter” given by the Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra put on by the Australian Broadcasting Commission at the Sydney Town Hall on August 10, 1929. This performance was largely ignored, with a tiny preview note in the newspaper,⁶¹ and a review that merely stated, “The movements from Gustav Holst’s suite... were well interpreted, though their effect would have been greater if the rhythm had been more pronounced.”⁶² A broadcast was also listed on December 6, 1929 in the newspaper, which should be regarded with importance, as more Australians would have heard this broadcast than had attended the Sydney concerts.⁶³

The next instance of *The Planets* seen in the media is a photo in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of “The winning set at the music week revel” – where the suite was represented by a group of people dressed up as the gods and goddesses of mythology of the movements as a representation of Holst’s famous work.⁶⁴

⁶¹ “Conservatorium Orchestra,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 8, 1929, 5.

⁶² “Orchestra With Mr. Murdoch – Concert at Town Hall,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 12, 1929, 8.

⁶³ Features for the Coming Week, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 6 7, 1929, 7.

⁶⁴ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 7, 1931, 12.



Figure 3.3 -The Representation of Holst's *Planets* in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.⁶⁵

Less amusing is that *The Planets* was not given again in its entirety anywhere in Australia throughout the scope of this thesis (up until 1950), aside from one guest appearance from the Czech-born British musician Walter Susskind, who conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in a complete performance just outside the 1950 cut-off on September 15, 1953. In the review of that concert, the critic Lindsey Browne reviewed the concert with a rather cavalier attitude, generally describing the work as “an over-long tone pageant bulging with spectacular myth and zodiacal allusion,” and continued:

⁶⁵ Image taken from newspaper article, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 7, 1931, 12.

If memory serves, the seven long and uneven character-studies of Holst's 'Planets' suite have not been heard in their entirety at a Sydney concert for more than a quarter of a century – and much that was then held to be brilliant and daring in rhythm, the teeming instrumentation, the turns of phrase, has since become rather the commonplace of standard practice. The black malignance of "Mars", for instance, is pretty pale hate beside the devil-lore of a Walton or a Vaughan Williams; and every Christmas tree in Hollywood seems to drip with just the shimmering stardust that Holst's "Venus" dispenses.⁶⁶

How the times change! This change of heart about Holst really is a commonplace occurrence throughout reviews of all of Holst's music in the British press, and also the overall 'feeling' towards Holst by musicians today. This review does however allude to the fact that whilst the initial originality struck audiences around the 1920s, such striking compositional language had become commonplace at that point in time. This sentiment in a way mirrors Imogen Holst's own analysis of the compositional language of "Neptune" discussed earlier – "those two chords are now common property, but they came to birth in *Neptune*, and for that one moment they opened the doors on an unknown world."⁶⁷ Lindsey Browne left out Imogen Holst's reflective sentiment of the wonder of the compositional language created by Holst, but the thought that the progress and development of compositional language in the twentieth-century could in any way blunt the astonishing achievement that is *The Planets* seems far-fetched at best.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ "Susskind With Orchestra," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 16, 1953, 5.

⁶⁷ Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst: A Biography*, 59.

⁶⁸ The increasing interest in recording the work throughout the latter part of the twentieth-century and the work's popularity today serve to counter this critic's argument.

The performances of parts of the suite resumed in May 1935 with a concert by the New South Wales State Orchestra under Edgar Bainton where *Jupiter* was performed in a collection of British works for the King's Jubilee. There was a preview article announcing the program to be given,⁶⁹ which rather presumptuously declared that, "*Jupiter*, from 'The Planets' Suite, represents the most important work of Gustav Holst."⁷⁰ Reviewed in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the performance was lightly attended, described by the reviewer as "a small gathering, with blocks of vacant seats to be seen in the Town Hall on every hand."⁷¹ There is acknowledgement of the performance history in the review:

Gustav Holst's "Jupiter" stood early on the second part. The full suite, "The Planets," from which "Jupiter" is drawn, was twice played in Sydney under Dr Arundel Orchard's regime at the Conservatorium; and could well be heard again, for it is a particularly vivid work, full of rich and varied imagination. Meanwhile, "Jupiter," with its fine, virile web of characteristic themes, came last night as a refreshing stimulus to memory.

This review does something no other review has done – credit a particular *person* for the performances of a work. This championing of Holst's music by individuals is extremely important and will be covered in greater detail later in the thesis.

Turning attention from Sydney to Melbourne, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performed "Mars" and "Jupiter from *The Planets* during a farewell concert for Dr

⁶⁹ "Music and Drama – Coming Events," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 11, 1935, 10.

⁷⁰ The other representative works chosen for this Jubilee performance included Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, *Cockaigne Overture* and the *Sea Pictures* song cycle; *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* by Delius; Vaughan Williams' *The Wasps Overture*; and Arnold Bax's *The Garden of Fand*.

⁷¹ "State Orchestra – A British Programme," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 16, 1935, 10.

Malcolm Sargent on October 17, 1936. Reviewed in *The Argus*, the movements were briefly described as “Arresting in colour and in design, the sections, ‘Mars’ and ‘Jupiter,’ from Gustav Holst’s ‘The Planets,’ brought a memorable concert season to a vivid conclusion.”⁷² There is the inference that this concert was well attended as a major season closing concert from a state orchestra, however all that is reflected in the review is “enthusiastically cheered by audience and players, Dr. Malcolm Sargent was recalled again and again to the platform at the conclusion of his farewell concert” at the Melbourne Town Hall. It would come as no surprise if Sargent himself was responsible for programming the Holst, as he was a close friend and constant champion of Holst’s music.⁷³ Sargent had previously conducted parts of the suite in England in November the year before (1934),⁷⁴ so it was certainly familiar to him.

A ballet by Anthony Tudor entitled “The Planets” which used “Venus,” “Mars,” “Mercury,” and “Jupiter” from Holst’s *The Planets* Suite was mentioned in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.⁷⁵ There was no mention in the evidence found of who performed the music (or even if it was live music used), or how it was received. The only description included was that Holst’s score was a “powerful, ambitious, modern work, conceived on a somewhat remote intellectual plane, full of gigantic things, astronomical and dynamic.”⁷⁶

⁷² “Notable Season – Dr. Sargent’s Farewell,” *The Argus*, October 19, 1936, 4.

⁷³ “He remained doggedly faithful... to Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst and Walton.” Ronald Crichton, “Sargent, Sir Malcolm,” *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/24590> (accessed September 2, 2014).

⁷⁴ “The Royal Choral Society – Delius, Elgar, and Holst,” *The Times*, November 5, 1934, 10.

⁷⁵ The first English performance of this Ballet was in London’s Mercury Theatre, October 28, 1934. <http://antonytudor.org/ballets/planets.html> (accessed September 28, 2014).

⁷⁶ The chief critic for *The Sydney Morning Herald* at the time was John Cardus, a fellow Englishman who had arrived in Australia in 1940 and taken up the post almost immediately. He would return to England in 1949, when the blunt and at times scathing Lindsey Browne took over as chief critic. “Sydney Sees Three New Ballets,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 15, 1948, 2.

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performed four movements from *The Planets* during a concert in the Melbourne Town Hall on Saturday July 17, 1948, which was reviewed in *The Argus*.⁷⁷ The review only mentions that the works were performed and “infused with powerful rhythm”, not even alluding to which of the movements were performed!⁷⁸ The conductor on this occasion was Joseph Post – significant, as Post was a performer in the 1926 Australian premiere of the work during his time at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.⁷⁹

The last performance was once more Joseph Post conducting, this time the Sydney Symphony Orchestra on 4 August 1951, reviewed later in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that the playing was accomplished in Holst’s work, of which “Mars,” “Venus,” “Mercury,” and “Jupiter” movements were performed.⁸⁰

Looking just outside the 1950 mark, another concert was given on 27 September 1952 in Melbourne, again with four movements of *The Planets* performed. No review was found however, only a preview note that stated The Sibelius Violin Concerto and four movements from *The Planets* would give special distinction to the programme.⁸¹

Conclusion

⁷⁷ “Joseph Post’s Fine Beethoven Fourth,” *The Argus*, July 19, 1948, 7.

⁷⁸ Given the abundance of concerts where several movements were performed, it is safe to assume that *Mars* and *Jupiter* were given here – and by taking in to account the future programme given by Joseph Post in Sydney, it is likely that the other two were “Venus” and “Mercury.”

⁷⁹ Post was on staff teaching oboe and cor anglais and participated in the orchestra. Diane Collins, “Post, Joseph Mozart,” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/post-joseph-mozart-11447/text20403> (accessed 3 October 3, 2014).

⁸⁰ “Joseph Post Acclaimed At Concert,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 6, 1951, 2.

⁸¹ “Music to Enjoy,” *The Argus*, September 27, 1952, 12.

In terms of the comparison between the performance history and reception, *The Planets* walked a very similar path in Australia as in Britain. Two distinct lines can be drawn, and performances placed on each side: Complete performances, and incomplete performances comprising individual movements. The British performances were closer to the end of the First World War, where complete performances would have been more difficult to stage with the available resources. It was only out of the generosity of Balfour Gardiner that the premiere of the complete score was able to take place. The work was recognized immediately for the substantial contribution to ‘English’ music that it was, and it received a run of performances by the London Symphony Orchestra both in London, and at the Queen’s Hall for several years. It is still important to note that sections of *The Planets* were being performed here and there in various combinations on programs around England - a manifestation that was to be common in Australia. The other obvious point that appears when looking over the performance programs and reviews is the frequency of certain names involved in conducting and performing the work. In Britain, it was Holst himself at the helm (usually at the Queen’s Hall), or Albert Coates (leading the London Symphony Orchestra) who also gave one of the first performances of the work in the United States.⁸² Whilst this is not out of the ordinary for performances of contemporary works, it is prevalent nonetheless – the ‘major’ performances given of

⁸² An anecdote given by Imogen Holst in *Gustav Holst: A Biography*, noted that there was a dispute over who should get to premiere *The Planets* – New York or Chicago. In the end both cities performed it on the same night, with New York getting in first, with Coates conducting in the earlier Eastern Time. Arundel Orchard also relayed his personal discussions with Holst, where the composer told him that “while only three performances of the complete work had been given outside the United Kingdom, the third of these, and the first outside of the United Kingdom, took place in Australia. This, of course, was the production in Sydney by Mr. Orchard and the Conservatorium Orchestra.” “Conservatorium – Children’s Concert,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 23, 1926, 7.

the work were happening in a concentrated area by the same ensembles for the most part, and the same conductors.

Examining the Australian premiere of *The Planets*, some six years after its British premiere, a clear image emerges from the presented evidence. A similar initial burst of complete performances comes about in 1925, with an almost symbiotic relationship with the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. Why such an impressive new work should be so well received and discussed, yet remain contained within one building for so long presents a key question. The answer is clear, and not restricted solely to *The Planets*. It is the composer and the work's contact with certain musicians, with those musicians that then take it with them to various places and perform it. In this case, it was the British conductor William Arundel Orchard who took up Holst's cause during his tenure as director of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. He not only performed the work with the orchestra, but also gave several public lectures that were noted in the press as very well attended by interested Sydney audiences in anticipation of his concerts.

Alfred Hill's association with the work was certainly through the New South Wales Conservatorium, where he was on staff from 1916 until 1934.⁸³ He had conducted *The Planets* with the Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra in Orchard's absence, but whether the score was known to him prior is unknown.⁸⁴ It may well have been that his close contact with Arundel Orchard saw him connected with the initial performances in Australia, but it is no certainty. He could be seen to have inherited the work with the orchestra, and not championed it as Orchard had.

⁸³ Andrew D McCredie, "Hill, Alfred Francis," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hill-alfred-francis-6667/text11495> (accessed October 14, 2014).

⁸⁴ He would almost certainly have attended the Conservatorium Orchestra's concerts when *The Planets* was performed, though with no evidence supporting this it must remain speculative.

The rare performances of *The Planets* given outside of Sydney were in Melbourne with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. The first of these performances is credited to the conductor Malcolm Sargent, who was about to head back to England after a long tour in Australia. *The Planets* would have certainly travelled to Melbourne with him, and been a familiar piece as he had conducted it with the London Symphony Orchestra six months prior. Louise Hanson-Dyer's library collection in Melbourne also contained the scores, although Sargent's connection should be assumed to be the reason for it being programmed. The orchestra played "Mars" and "Jupiter" on this occasion, and those were to be augmented by "Venus" and "Mercury" in later Melbourne Symphony Orchestra appearances. The two other performances are under the conductor Joseph Post. Once more, the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music plays its part; Post was both studying and teaching there in 1926 and 1927 when the second and third performances were given where he was most certainly in the orchestra.⁸⁵ It is no stretch to assume that Post was also involved in the Australian premiere in December 1925. He was just about as closely connected to the work as could be without having the direct connection to Holst as had both Orchard and Sargent.

There is a prominent question that presents itself with *The Planets* in Australia – why so many initial performances and subsequent 'bits and pieces' performances found throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, and then the work then almost totally disappeared. The cause for this was war, specifically the Second World War. The disruption and chaos that enveloped both Britain and Australia during wartime would

⁸⁵ Diane Collins, "Joseph Mozart Post," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

put things like contemporary music performance far down the priority list. As it was shown, performances required the efforts not only of a few champions (in this case, Holst himself, Coates, Balfour-Gardiner, Orchard, Sargent, and Post arranging for the performance of a contemporary work), but also the work of many in terms of the precious resources of orchestral musicians, audiences and time. Holst's death in 1934 was parallel with the lull in performances, but if anything, there would be an opposite expectation – in a resurgence of the composer's music in memorial, which would only fuel further performances.⁸⁶

Louise Hanson-Dyer had established a library of contemporary British music in Victoria, and had purchased all of Holst's music, including the score of *The Planets* for it. This meant that access to the physical scores for performances were less of a problem in Australia than previously; there was at least one copy available a short distance away. A performance of the work would not have been solely reliant on a conductor needing to have brought their own on tour or with them when moving to Australia, as may have been the case if such a collection had not been established.

It is Arundel Orchard, then, who was ultimately responsible for establishing *The Planets* in Australia. He was directly responsible for most of the performances, and the subsequent offshoot performances through connections at the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music (the work's foothold in 'the colonies'). Some connections with the original Australian premiere performance, such as Joseph Post who was to go on to be a prominent conductor himself, were involved in most of the rest of its performances in Australia up until and just after the Second World War. There is the

⁸⁶ The 'bits and pieces' of performances were found in Holst memorials in Britain, never a complete performance.

direct British crossover in Malcolm Sargent who conducted the work in Britain before coming to Australia. This is unique, however, and is nowhere near the impact of Orchard's championing of the work. One thing is certain, and that is *The Planets* has firmly established itself in the permanent repertory of Australian and international orchestras at the start of the 21st century.

Chapter 4 – The Operas

While *The Planets* suite cemented Holst as a composer of international recognition, it was his operas *At the Boar's Head*, *The Perfect Fool*, and *Savitri* that assured his position in the British view as *their* composer.

The span of Holst's operas covers two decades - the small scale of Holst's earliest works for the stage—several unadventurous, though competent, operettas—soon gave way to more ambitious plans. The culmination was *Sita* (1900–06), whose three acts are in the grandest, most extravagant style, and whose musical language is, for the most part, saturated with Wagnerian influences. Yet by 1908, when *Sita* (composed after the Royal College of Music study period) was eventually awarded Second Prize in the Ricordi competition for which he had entered it,¹ Holst had composed *Savitri*, and with it he completely turned his back on the whole Wagnerian apparatus. The opera is in one act with no overture; no curtain is required; there are only three characters; the plot is of the utmost simplicity; and the orchestra consists of no more than twelve musicians. The twenty-year period sees the development of the composer emerge into his full individual voice. This chapter will examine the performance history and reception of the three key operas in Australia - *Savitri*, *At the Boar's Head* and *The Wandering Scholar* - and will reflect on causal factors for the individual nature of the work.

¹ Edwin Evans, "Holst, Gustav Theodore," in *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 3rd Ed. Vol. 2, edited H. C. Colles (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1927), 659. The work was never performed – that is in Australia or anywhere else, so will not be treated here.

Savitri

Holst's "perfect little masterpiece"² *Savitri* was written in 1908, two years after his substantially longer and denser three-act opera *Sita*. His first attempt at opera had been written in his early studious period - even before he had heard a single English folk-song that would so dramatically influence his compositional language - and so it is more understandable that *Sita* never received much attention and was not viewed as a proper example of "Holst."³

Savitri (1900-1906) on the other hand, was important for several reasons: it was the first English chamber opera since the end of the seventeenth century and this small scale opera (moving beyond merely inventive to 'radical,') is performed in one movement and with no overture.⁴ It was considered revolutionary because there are only three characters and the accompanying orchestra consists of no more than 12 musicians. In the same way that the subject matter (drawn from the Indian philosophical epic the *Mahabharata*) seeks to cut through ignorance that views illusion as reality, Holst too strips away all of the usual stage illusions in an attempt to focus on the paired down truth of the music – a radical approach in the early 1900s.

The subject can partly explain this revolution in Holst's approach to opera. In *Sita* he had

² "Savitri – Holst's Unconventional Opera," *The Times*, June 24, 1921, 13.

³ Holst himself would look back on the work and describe it as "Good old Wagnerian bawling." Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press), 21.

⁴ "Introduction on Savitri by Holst," *Hyperion Records*, <http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/al.asp?al=CDH55042> (accessed September 14, 2014).

turned to the great Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, and had tried to enter into its world of spirits and demons, gods and mortals—a world not far removed from Wagner’s ‘Ring’. In choosing *Savitri*, an episode from another great classic of Sanskrit literature, the *Mahabharata*, Holst found a subject that was still epic in its scope - the triumph of love over death - but whose setting was simple and homely. He responded with music of equal simplicity. This simplicity is represented in the economy of Holst's musical composition.

Although in the final scene of *Sita* Holst had already begun to find his own voice and had shown that he was capable of expressing emotion with a telling economy of means, this new directness of *Savitri* is a remarkable achievement. The opening of *Savitri* is like no other opera. The voice of Death is heard in the distance, summoning Satyavan, the husband of Savitri. Savitri herself joins Death in counterpoint (not dialogue), and their voices remain unaccompanied for fully three minutes.

It is clear how the subject matter impacts Holst’s musical language. When Satyavan sings of ‘maya’—illusion—his voice is set against the remote sound of a wordless female chorus (their voices symbolize the divine world interacting with the mortal). More recently, Andrew Clements has written highly of how well the opera combines 'Eastern' culture into a 'Western' music format⁵ and we will see below how the exotic nature of this piece is just the right ingredient for it’s being chosen as the centerpiece for a fundraiser that constitutes its Australian launch. Sāvitri, wife of the woodman Satyavān, hears the voice of Death calling to

⁵ Andrew Clements, "Savitri," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2004, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/may/20/classicalmusicandopera> (accessed online September 12, 2014).

her. He has come to claim her husband. Satyavān arrives to find his wife in distress, but assures Sāvitri that her fears are but Māyā (illusion): "All is unreal, all is Māyā." Even so, at the arrival of Death, all strength leaves him and he falls to the ground. Sāvitri, now alone and desolate, welcomes Death. The latter, moved to compassion by her greeting, offers her a boon of anything but the return of Satyavān. Sāvitri asks for life in all its fullness. After Death grants her request, she informs him that life is impossible without Satyavān. Death, defeated, leaves her. Satyavān awakens to prove that even death is an illusion.

The extraordinary economy of *Savitri* was designed for an open-air performance or a small building, as Holst himself inscribed on the first page of the score:

Note: - This piece is intended for performance in the open air, or else in a small building. When a Curtain is used, it should be raised before the voice of Death is heard. No Curtain, however, is necessary.⁶

Even though *Savitri* was finished in 1908, it had to wait until 1921 for its premiere performance at Hammersmith, where it received positive reviews. Imogen Holst, as devoted daughter and one of the greatest promoters of her father's music spoke straightforwardly about the avant-garde moves made by him in peeling away the props that often added comfortable context to the more traditional forms of music explaining in her analysis of *Savitri*:

It is a complete revolution. The size of the orchestra is astonishing enough, but perhaps the most illuminating sentence of all is the remark that 'No curtain is necessary.' He was not only throwing overboard the red glow of the sunset and all the other clap-trap; he was prepared to do without the last bulwark of theatrical make-believe. He had

⁶ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 24-27.

discovered that he had got to rely on his own words and music to create his atmosphere, as Purcell had relied on his score when he wrote ‘Dido and Aeneas’ for a girls’ school in Chelsea...⁷

Two weeks after the Hammersmith performance, Holst’s “complete revolution” was performed in the new Royal College of Music Theatre, again amongst declarations of its importance to Britain’s operatic canon, all while creating a unique idiom within it.⁸ It was two years later in 1923 when the work began to experience negativity for the first time. There began a stream of bad performance reviews, with productions failing to do the work justice, with the larger stages directly blamed in each instance.⁹ Even though the execution of performances were leaving much to be desired, each critic spent a portion of most reviews proclaiming *Savitri* as the most important thing to happen to British opera since Purcell, lamenting the lack of proper venues in the country for performances of works of *Savitri*’s scale. There were groupings of performances coming at several yearly intervals, all the way through 1935, when it suddenly disappeared from the British scene.

Setting the scene in this way from the British perspective allows us to see the originality, momentum and some of the hurdles faced by the work before it came to Australia where it provided audiences with insight into the individuality of the composer’s work.

⁷ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 24.

⁸ The premiere at Hammersmith garnered a heading of “A Future for Opera – Holst’s *Savitri*” in its *Times* review, and the second review reinforced the notion of importance stating “It is the occasional appearance of such works [*Savitri*] which keeps us convinced that there is a future for English opera of a serious kind... It belongs to no accepted category of opera, refers to no precedents, but creates its own idiom in the process of surrounding a beautiful idea with an imaginative musical atmosphere.”

⁹ It is strange that a work that specifically directs it be produced in a certain space / under certain conditions should have been so purposefully ignored by those that were pushing for it to be a success for British opera.

Australian Reception

Savitri received a large amount of build-up in the Australian press prior to its performance on September 30, 1926, and could be seen to rival *The Planets* in its anticipation as a musical event and in the media coverage it received. As early as March 1924, a report from London was seen in the Australian press.¹⁰ *Savitri* would then reappear in 1926, with the initial and quite detailed announcement of the first production of *Savitri* in Australia appears in *The Argus*.¹¹

To enlarge the endowment fund of the Victorian Branch of the British Music Society, so that the branch will be established on a firm financial basis, Mr Clive Carey has offered to produce Gustave [sic] Holst's one-act opera, "Savitri," at the Playhouse on September 30. This opera has not yet been performed in Australia. Mr Carey produced it and sang the bass part in London. Madame Elsie Treweek will sing the soprano part, and the Professor Bernard Heinze will conduct... In addition to "Savitri" the programme will include "Clorillo and His Phyllis," invented by Mr. Clive Carey, the music by Purcell, and orchestrated by Miss Margaret Sutherland, with the ballets by pupils of Miss Jennie Brennan, their costumes designed by Mrs. James Dyer [Louise Hanson-Dyer], Phantasies by Orlando Gibbons, and "The Hymn to Travellers" and "To Varona" by Gustave [sic] Holst.

This initial preview immediately highlighted an important point about the production of *Savitri* in Australia – that Clive Carey's involvement in the British production was significant, and that he was taking on the production of the Australian performance. The

¹⁰ "Stage Gossip," *The Argus*, March 1, 1924, 8.

¹¹ "British Music Society – Gustave [sic] Holst's *Savitri*," *The Argus*, August 11, 1926, 16.

public were shown this connection to the British premiere, which gave a certain performance authenticity that otherwise would have been absent. The effect of this would have been the heightening of a keen public interest. This will be a common theme in the following reviews, a feature not seen in any of Holst's other works, excepting *The Planets*.

It is seen, then, that this is the start of what is the largest build up in the media of any Holst work or performance. In Australia's island state of Tasmania, Hobart's *The Mercury* newspaper reported the following day:

BRITISH MUSIC. We had not long to wait to reap the benefit of the visit of the Quartet Party from the Elder Conservatorium, Adelaide. The party brought with it a vocalist, Mr. Clive Cary [sic], who has so roused the enthusiasm of our lovers of modern English composers that the Victorian branch of the British Musical Society is to produce Gustave [sic] Holst's "Savitri," under Mr. Cary's [sic] capable management. There is to be a big all-British night at the Playhouse, when Holst's opera will be produced, together with an old opera of Purcell's, which has been orchestrated by our own Margaret Sutherland, with ballets arranged by Miss Jennie Brennan, and costumes designed by Mrs. James Dyer. This wave of enthusiasm promises to carry us a step further than we have ever got before, and miles further than we would ever get by merely attending in thousands at the concerts of foreign artists. Percy Grainger always contends that composers need a "welcoming" atmosphere. At last they are to get it here.¹²

The "welcoming atmosphere" claimed for Holst is instructive. The problem was not the initial reception of either the work or the composer, but the dissipation of interest over time, after the performance. Almost universally his music was received warmly, and more often

¹² "The Mainland Day by Day," *The Mercury*, August 12, 1926, 6.

than not the ‘wave of enthusiasm’ accompanied it, only to diminish and disappear into the historical dust without leaving much of a footprint. This premiere of *Savitri*, however, was gathering momentum and ‘hype’ in the Australian press. Clive Carey himself was credited with having “so roused the enthusiasm of our lovers of modern English composers” – the notion of a champion of British national music in Australia’s postcolonial environment would turn out to be of extreme importance to mounting performances of contemporary British composers’ works. Here it seems that Carey was acting as a promoter to the *Savitri* event, stirring excitement during a completely different concert. The atmosphere he was personally creating was vital to the success of the work – certainly it was an effective marketing strategy. This review highlights the public’s enthusiasm at having an authentic connection to a work or composer.

A lecture on the work was next in the build-up, given by Fritz Hart for the Melbourne Music Club, reported in *The Argus*.¹³ Such lectures were not only educational –with expert analyses on the work, things to listen for, and often background information to the composer or the specific work – but also strategic to promote interest and awareness, as well as encouraging ticket sales. This review outlined that there was “a large gathering of members and friends,” and also stated that Fritz Hart had said “*Savitri*... was written about 20 years ago, when Mr. Holst was still strongly under the influence of Wagner.” Hart was quick to correct this inaccurate impression a few days later with a Letter to the Editor, which gave some insight into the relationship of the composers who attended the Royal College of Music with Holst.¹⁴

Sir. – In the report of my lecture to members of the Melbourne Music Club last night, the statement is attributed to me that Gustav Holst, in his charming little opera,

¹³ “Social Events – Melbourne Music Club,” *The Argus*, September 4, 1926, 25.

¹⁴ “Holst’s *Savitri* – To the Editor of *The Argus*,” *The Argus*, September 6, 1926, 20.

“Savitri,” was strongly influenced by Wagner. If I gave this impression it was as much against my intention as it was against my conviction. Possibly, in a somewhat hasty generalisation, I failed to make myself clear on a certain point. I wished to say that though in “Savitri” there is still an occasional evidence of Wagner’s influence to be discerned, however slight, yet “Savitri” is nevertheless *pure Holst*.¹⁵ In his earlier days, like most of us who were his contemporaries at the Royal College of Music, Holst was obsessed for a time by the mighty spirit of the Bayreuth master: but, in my opinion, “Savitri” is one of the first works in which Holst declared his complete individuality, even though it cannot be accepted as wholly representative of the composer of “The Planets” and “The Hymn of Jesus.” Possibly the misapprehension, for which I am willing to take all the blame, arose from a certain passage in “Savitri,” which I happened to play as an example, and to which I directed passing attention, remarking upon the fact that, even in this truly Holstian work, signs of the influence of the “great Richard” had not yet entirely disappeared. In view of the forthcoming production in Melbourne of “Savitri,” and in order to remove any possibility of misunderstanding, I wish to state emphatically that this beautiful work by one of my best and oldest friends is as truly typical of Holst as the “Pastoral Symphony” is of Vaughan Williams, or “The Song of the High Hills” is of Delius. Yours, FRITZ BENNICKE HART, Sept. 4.

It should be noted that there may have been confusion, too, if Holst’s *Sita* was discussed - also being a Sanskrit work and an opera that was completed a mere two years prior to *Savitri* that was stylistically heavily ‘Wagnerian.’ The point that *Savitri* is not “wholly representative” of the Holst that composed other major works such as *The Planets* and *The Hymn of Jesus* earmarked that although *Savitri* is a “truly Holstian work,” the audience

¹⁵ Emphasis mine.

should not expect the same stylistic idiom of the already-renown *Planets*.¹⁶ In fact, the paired down scale of *Savitri* is one of its defining features, and had been widely focussed on in the British press. In the *Argus* later that same week, yet another preview note appeared.¹⁷ Once more, the British Music Society is credited, as are those producing the opera. It concludes, though, with the statement “Mrs. Dyer wishes it to be known that the performance is to be open to the public, as there has been some misunderstanding that the performance was only for members of the British Music Society.” Clearly there was interest from the public, fostered by the activity surrounding the performance set for September 30 – raising funds for the British Music Society. Several more preview notes appear in *The Argus*,¹⁸ as well as the *Western Mail* in Perth.¹⁹ The preview in *The Argus* on the day of the performance summed up the considerable efforts involved:

Elaborate arrangements have been made by Mrs. James Dyer and a strong organising committee of those who are interested in the work of the British Music Society (Victorian section) for the production Gustav Holst’s opera, “Savitri,” at the Playhouse to-night [sic]. The booking has been exceptional, and only a few seats remain, none of which will be sold below a guinea. Only one performance will be given, and the object is to enlarge the endowment fund of the Victorian section of the British Music Society, so that it will be established on a firm financial basis. Already £1000 has been subscribed by Mrs. Dyer and her friends. The aims of the society are to stimulate interest in British music; to encourage the work of Australian composers; to afford facilities to Australian musicians studying in other countries; and to foster the spirit of

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Hart uses *The Planets* as the comparison – so successful and requested as it was he must have known that an audience turning up to hear something similar would be disappointed. This was entirely different style of music to the large orchestral suite, both in instrumentation, texture, and language.

¹⁷ “Savitri,” *The Argus*, September 8, 1926, 22.

¹⁸ “Music and Drama – Playhouse Savitri,” *The Argus*, September 20, 1926, 22.

“Savitri – Performance at Playhouse,” *The Argus*, September 21, 1926, 15.

The Argus, September 27, 1926, 14.

¹⁹ “Melbourne Talk,” *Western Mail*, September 30, 1926, 36.

international music... As a prelude to “Savitri” the orchestra will play Gustav Holst’s “Hymn to Travellers.” Mr Holst has requested that this shall be played before each performance of “Savitri.”²⁰

After the month-long build up in the press, this final preview highlighted the popularity of the event. While the patronage of the British Music Society members at the performance was to be taken for granted, that the event was at this stage almost sold out indicates a large general public attendance. The mission statement of the Society as stated in the preview is essentially exactly what would be needed to actually mount a performance of any contemporary work outside the auspices of a university. It is clear that the production of *Savitri* was constantly lauded as a fundraiser for the establishment of the new Victorian section of the British Music Society, but the sheer saturation of advertising that the September 30 enjoyed in the press indicates that the Australian premiere was a much anticipated musical event.²¹ There was even coverage in Perth about the Melbourne premiere on the same day.²² There is no indication of the origin of Holst’s “request” for the programming of the *Hymn to Travellers*, but one might assume that Carey’s close association with Holst and the London production of *Savitri*, or the conductor Bernard Heinze would have been the most likely sources.²³

²⁰ “Savitri – Performance To-night,” *The Argus*, September 30, 1926, 8.

²¹ This also indicated that the British Music Society might have had influential connections with members in the press that could be called upon to help with such publicity. Louise Hanson-Dyer’s work behind the scenes was significant, and it was Carey’s proposal to mount the work that gave Dyer an opportunity to capitalize on Carey’s stature and reputation, involving Bernard Heinze to conduct. Daniela Kaleva, “Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer’s Patronage of Gustav Holst,” *Context* 37 (2012): 85.

²² “Music,” *Western Mail*, September 30, 1926, 37.

²³ There was no evidence to show that the Hymn to Travellers was ever given with *Savitri* in Britain – this is interesting in that the many performances afforded *Savitri*, the productions seemed to ignore Holst’s instructions for a smaller building or open-air setting, and if this claim is to be believed, the programming of the *Hymn to Travellers*.

The day after the much-anticipated performance saw the initial review in *The Argus*.²⁴ It was an elaborate and detailed description that warrants an expansive account:

In the hands of Mrs. James Dyer the Victorian branch of the British Music Society is a force to be reckoned with, and such an achievement as the concert given last night in the Playhouse deserves to be fully recognised and gratefully acknowledged. An immense amount of thought had clearly been given to the planning of this entertainment, and an equal amount of energy to its accomplishment. Mrs. Dyer had good reason to feel that the results were commensurate with this lavish expenditure, and that the cause of music in general, and of British music in particular, had been materially served. The choice of music reflected, in a striking manner, both one phase of the present renaissance in English music and those roots in the past whence it may be seen to have sprung. Preliminary notices had stated “Savitri” would be preceded by a short programme of unusual interest, and the event fully justified the prophecy... It was rather late in the evening when “Savitri” itself came in sight. The story, an episode from the Mahabharata, carries conviction, and indeed grips the attention by its intimacy and directness. Mr. Carey as Death was majestic and awe-inspiring; Madame Goossens-Viceroy’s Savitri had all the necessary passion and nobility; and Mr. Norman Bennett made the difficult part of Satyavan tell in its diverse phases. The very interesting chorus parts were entrusted to the Cecilia Choir, under Mrs. Minnie Bull, together with the special “Savitri” chorus. Professor Bernard Heinze was conductor-in-chief, Mr. Carey acted as producer, and the very beautiful scenery was the handiwork of Mr. W. R. Coleman.

There are in “Savitri” some wonderful moments. Where the words, adapted by Holst himself give scope for it, there is sometimes a very welcome lyrical element.

²⁴ “British Music Society – Holst’s ‘Savitri’ Striking Production,” *The Argus*, October 1, 1926, 12.

Elsewhere the “dark forest” atmosphere is somewhat dense, and a trifle protracted: and the “Orientalism” dodge is distinctly overworked. It does not really represent English music at its best.

After the performance Sir Robert Garran thanked Professor Bernard Heinze, Mr. Clive Carey, and the performers on the behalf of Mrs. James Dyer, and added an expression of thanks of music Melbourne to Mrs. Dyer, who, he said, had through organising this performance had earned their deepest thanks and appreciation. Mrs. Dyer responded briefly. The committee now estimate the amount of the fund as approaching £2,000.

Analysing this review, there a barb slipped between the compliments – “It does not really represent English music at its best.” Compared to the initial reception received in the British press after the 1921 premiere, this “perfect little masterpiece of its kind” was indeed seen as *the best of British!*²⁵ Even more so, the reviewer in the *Times* stated in a later review, “It is the occasional appearance of such works (*Savitri*) which keeps us convinced that there is a future for English opera of a serious kind.”²⁶ Clearly the English were desperate to claim any victory for English music and her interests, but this disparity in opinion shows the plight of Holst’s musical language against the pervasive ‘pastoralist’ associated with Vaughan Williams through Australian ears. The performance was shown to be a huge success, not only in its musical and dramatic execution, but also in its organisation and commercial success.

²⁵ At this point in 1926, several British performances in a 1923 run were the victims of bad productions, and had diluted the original excitement in the reviews over the new opera. The British press might have had an impact for comments such as this critic presented. An alternative, and perhaps more common suggestion is that, like many in Britain, the less exotic musical idioms of other British composers resonated more with conservative ears.

²⁶ “A Future for Opera – Holst’s *Savitri*,” *The Times*, July 16, 1921, 8.

An afterthought was given later that week, with acknowledgment of the two choirs involved in the performance.²⁷ The mention has the feeling of a debriefing – a ‘final’ passing comment after the saturation of previewing done and reviewing after. After such an anticipated event it comes as no surprise to see such a note amongst the reporting of musical activities.

A delayed review appeared in Perth on October 14 1926, in the Western Australian article which was dated October 7.²⁸

At the Playhouse on Thursday night, Melbourne folk were given a rare treat, Gustav Holst’s “Savitri” was produced. This is the first time this tone poem has been put on in Melbourne, and it is due entirely to Mrs. Dyer’s brains, personal work and lavish spending of money, that Melbourne folk enjoy the pleasures of things uncommon. The performance was in aid of the funds for the British Music Society in Melbourne... Interest centred round “Savitri,” which was played after the interval. The deep blue of an Indian night sky was the setting. Madame A. Goossens-Viceroy, in the name part, was a great success. She looked the Indian and managed her “sari” as to the manner born. Clive Carey, the Adelaide baritone, made an impressive “Death.” The theatre was decorated in Indian tones; girls selling sweets and flowers were all dressed in bright Indian dress. Everyone in the house called for Mrs. Dyer after the performance, and would not be denied till she emerged from the depths of one of the boxes. Coming to the front, she made a little speech, giving all the credit to the performers. Sir Robert Garran voiced everyone’s feelings when he said: - “Musical Melbourne owes Mrs. Dyer a debt of gratitude that cannot be estimated.”

This ‘review’ seems suspicious immediately. Describing *Savitri* as a tone poem is the most obvious error, and there were two other points that, while technically correct, are not the

²⁷ “Musical Society’s Concert,” *The Argus*, October 4 1926, 13.

²⁸ “Melbourne Talk,” *Western Mail*, October 14, 1926, 36

observations or insight of a musical expert. The wording that this was the first time it was produced *in Melbourne*, not Australia, stands out as too local given the extensive coverage and knowledge of a national premiere. The claiming of Clive Carey as an “Adelaide baritone” when he was an Englishman and former professor at the Royal College of Music - all of which were acknowledged in all the other press leading up to the premiere is misleading, is again a statement of a non-musician that was simplifying (or simply did not understand Carey’s background). The focus on the atmosphere and details like the dress of house staff selling sweets does not fit the normal *modus operandi* of serious musical criticism. The most likely explanation for these inaccuracies are that the reporter was not a music critic but a general correspondent²⁹ – the length of time between event and the report appearing in the *Western Mail* would suggest that the author was in attendance, even though a ‘review’ such as this could easily be based on the review appearing in *The Argus*.

Passing mention of the performance of *Savitri* was made in the press in the following months in both Adelaide³⁰ and Sydney.³¹ It is strange, given Carey’s standing in Adelaide, that there was little attention paid to the production of *Savitri* and the success of the production in his ‘home state.’ Consideration was also given to produce a number of well and lesser-known operas including *Savitri* in broadcasts by the A.B.C in 1935,³² but there are no further reports of the opera being performed in Australia up until the end of scope of this thesis in the 1950s.

²⁹ Further evidence is inferred as this report was found among many other general reports in “Melbourne Talk,” instead of a specific musical account.

³⁰ “Recently, with the assistance of Mr. Clive Carey... the [British Music] society produced Gustav Holst’s opera, “Savitri,” at the Melbourne Playhouse, when the work was given for the first time in Australia.” *The Advertiser*, October 11, 1926, 12.

³¹ “Mr. Carey, who is now on the staff of the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide, produced Holst’s opera “Savitri” when it was performed not long since in Melbourne.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 30, 1927, 9.

³² “Broadcast Opera – Sydney Season Announced,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 20, 1935, 10.

At the Boar's Head

At the Boar's Head was composed in 1924, and the libretto employed the words from the tavern scenes in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. Lasting just under an hour, it is very much on the Holst-ian 'operetta' scale.³³ Holst manoeuvred Shakespeare's words around traditional folk-songs and both Morris and country-dance tunes, after the chance discovery rummaging through Cecil Sharp's collection of Morris tunes and finding that one just happened to fit against a line of the play he was reading at that time.³⁴ Holst was to enjoy the task of setting the words to the dances, with the joins and transitions between the folk-tunes effortlessly handled, and humorous representations used to delightful effect – such as when Falstaff is demanding a cup of sack, and notices the server has put lime in it, Holst forcefully changes keys with Falstaff's discovery. Holst himself stated that *At the Boar's Head* was “an opera that wrote itself.”³⁵

At the Boar's Head, while acknowledged in its British reception as an important addition to the British operatic canon, never had the same impact in Australia. The small opera is only mentioned in two newspapers in Australia, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Brisbane Courier*, and was not performed at all even after the relative success of its Covent Garden debut. The first mention seen in *The Sydney Morning Herald* stated:

³³ Holst had clearly captured a new and unique idiom in *Savitri* with the production and scale being much smaller than traditional opera. The review of the premiere of *Savitri* stated that “is a thing apart, a perfect little masterpiece of its kind, and we can think of nothing else which belongs to the same kind... *Savitri* is to most modern opera what the clavichord is to a grand piano.” “Savitri – Holst's Unconventional Opera,” *The Times*, June 24, 1921, 13.

³⁴ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 86.

³⁵ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 86-87.

Gustav Holst, one of the most prominent of the new British composers, has written a Falstaff opera, entitled, “At the Boar’s Head.” The Shakespearian text has been used freely....The new work was to have been performed by the British National Opera Company, when the last mail left London. This is Mr Holst’s fourth opera. One of his earlier scores, “The Perfect Fool,” was given at Covent Garden nearly two years ago, when the beauty of much of its music commanded immediate attention.³⁶

This article shows Holst’s elevation in the media – not only does a preview appear in an Australian paper for a London debut, but there is the acknowledgement of Holst as “one of the most prominent of the new British composers,” and that his work (in this case *The Perfect Fool*) “commanded immediate attention.” By the mid 1920s Holst was well and truly on the musical map and in the public eye, with the success of *The Planets* and never more so than with his operatic contributions to a very new, and proudly ‘British operatic tradition.’ The longer paragraph of coverage delves into the Shakespearian material on which the opera was built, but the message conveyed by the preview is the conviction of Holst’s importance in British music.

The only other reference to *At the Boar’s Head* was in a social column in Queensland’s *The Brisbane Courier*. Titled *A Musical Holiday*, it outlined the overseas experiences of Miss Vada Jefferies, who gave her account of the musical scene in London in 1926:

Both musicians thoroughly enjoyed the Mozart operas of “Figaro,” “The Magic Flute,” “Don Giovanni,” and “The Barber of Seville,” while among more modern works they were privileged to hear “The Boar’s Head,” a new opera by Gustav Holst, which Miss Jefferies describes as “very modern,” ... and Vaughan Williams’ much-discussed opera

³⁶ “Music and Drama – New Falstaff Opera,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 9, 1925, 10.

“Hugh the Drover.” A wonderful performance which greatly impressed the Queensland visitors was that of Coleridge Taylor’s “Hiawatha,” which was given in costume, in the Albert Hall.³⁷

Whilst only mentioned in a list of attended performances, it is nonetheless a reflection of the contemporary operatic scene in London – the juxtaposition of the classical Mozart with the all-important task of establishing the new British opera school.

The Perfect Fool

The initial sketches of *The Perfect Fool* were made during Holst’s tour of the Middle East where he was helping the YMCA organize the co-ordination of entertainment and musical activities and performances for the troops waiting for demobilization, and completed after his return.³⁸ It had been a decade and a wealth of experience since *Savitri*, and Holst was set on writing his own libretto.³⁹ The ballet music Holst wrote for *The Perfect Fool* happened to be the first part of the work to be heard publicly, and stirred a great deal of interest before the full opera was premiered in Britain. This first public performance of the ballet music, which was part of an open rehearsal at the Royal College of Music, was described by a critic as “the

³⁷ “In the Social Sphere – A Musical Holiday,” *The Brisbane Courier*, February 24, 1926, 20.

³⁸ Holst would leave shortly after the private performance of *The Planets* organized by Balfour Gardiner on September 29, returning from duty in June 1919.

³⁹ Imogen Holst reflected on this endeavour by saying “he had learnt a great deal, but he had not yet learnt that he was incapable of writing his own libretto,” and during her analysis of the work in *The Music of Gustav Holst*, she notes how the self-written libretto was to the detriment of the work – “When *The Perfect Fool* ballet comes to an end the listener is immediately aware of the painful inadequacy of Holst’s libretto... One is plunged into uncomfortable sensation of having been tricked into attending the performance of a charade instead of an opera.” Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 67-68.

most interesting work.”⁴⁰ There were several more performances of the ballet music alone, including a Philharmonic concert under Albert Coates, and a Promenade Concert, both in London.⁴¹ The full opera of *The Perfect Fool* had to wait until 1923 for its full premiere - and it seemed worth the wait - with the British National Opera Company using it as a centrepiece for its season opener that year. It received immediate acclaim and was ‘revived’ by the British National Opera Company in 1924, alongside *Savitri*. This time it was not so well received, with one critic noting “one fears that *The Perfect Fool* is not wearing well with acquaintance... much of the remainder is too naive in its humour to bear repeated hearing... The performance, as a whole, did not go well.”⁴² After these performances in the national spotlight, *The Perfect Fool* dropped off the radar entirely in England – which in terms of contemporary music was not uncommon.⁴³ It is, however, a contrast to the many performances given to *Savitri* in England, particularly with the desperation for a new British opera scene and the amount of praise heaped on Holst’s attempts in the genre.

Australian Reception

When *The Perfect Fool* debuted at Covent Garden in London, it was an important enough cultural event to be relayed to the Australian press immediately. In an article written by Harrison Owen, appearing in *The West Australian* shortly after the Covent Garden performances, a detailed account of the premiere was given:

⁴⁰ “The Perfect Fool – Ballet from Holst’s New Opera,” *The Times*, July 1, 1921, 8.

⁴¹ “Promenade Concerts – Holst’s ‘The Perfect Fool,’” *The Times*, September 22, 1922, 8.

“The Perfect Fool – Holst Opera at Covent Garden,” *The Times*, May 15, 1923, 12.

⁴² “Opera at Covent Garden – Holst’s ‘Savitri’ and ‘The Perfect Fool,’” *The Times*, January 10, 1924, 10.

⁴³ Much of the evidence provided in Chapter 2 – the British reviews for each work – essentially confirm this point repeatedly.

In the production at Covent Garden, at the beginning of this week, of Mr. Gustav Holst's opera, "The Perfect Fool," some enthusiasts discern a sign that a happy turning point has been reached in the history of English opera. That the summer season at Covent Garden should be opened with the production of a British opera sung by British singers certainly constitutes a notable departure from precedent... These facts provide ample cause for gratification at the production of Mr. Holst's opera, but it is too early to talk, as some enthusiasts are doing, as if British opera will now be heard regularly in London. Similar prophecies were made a generation ago when Sir Arthur Sullivan launched his "Ivanhoe" at the Royal English Opera House. "Ivanhoe" was a great success, but a dearth of suitable operas soon put an end to the worthy aspirations of those who had hoped to place English opera squarely on its feet... These reflections should not prevent a full measure of praise being accorded to those responsible for the production of "The Perfect Fool" ... The whole performance lasts only a little more than an hour and a half, but on the first night Mr. Holst's opera was given as the sole item of the evening (subsequent performances of the work will be given in conjunction with another opera), and the foyer was thrown open after the performance, so that the fashionable audience might sit about and discuss the merits of the work they had just heard. Altogether, although "The Perfect Fool" is by no means a perfect opera, Mr. Holst deserves credit for a notable achievement, and one can only hope that the opinion of the optimists, that he has opened up the path to other British composers, will be justified.⁴⁴

The air of importance and longing for a successor to Purcell in British opera is apparent in the language of such articles, and it was not difficult to see that the British were pinning the

⁴⁴ "London Life – A Commentary," *The West Australian*, June 19, 1923, 5.

responsibility on Holst at this point.⁴⁵ A similar sentiment was reported in the Queensland press, with a London correspondent giving the “Covent Garden Up-to-date,” which in this case appears to be quite behind!

The day seems happily gone for ever when nothing English was allowed to be sung or to sing at Covent Garden, when diamonds in the boxes competed with stars on the stage... Now we have to pay for our long neglect of English musicians in taking what we can get from them and waiting while these ill-used plants recover from the want of sunshine and water for so many years. The British National Opera Company is going to produce at last at Covent Garden one of our few operas, Mr Gustav Holst’s sarcastic and witty opera, “The Perfect Fool,” on May 14. The libretto as well as the music is by himself, and he says that its story might belong in any country and any time and would be quite properly placed in two or three different settings, and it is true that a fool is a fool in any setting.⁴⁶

Progressing into the 1930s, the only performance of music from *The Perfect Fool* was found after Holst’s death and was given under the baton of Malcolm Sargent and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. The ballet music from *The Perfect Fool* was presented on a program including Cesar Franck’s Symphony, the Brahms *Violin Concerto* and Sargent’s own *A Windy Day*. The review showed the excitement that surrounded Holst’s Ballet music:

An admirable rendering of the Wizard’s ballet from Gustav Holst’s opera, *The Perfect Fool*, aroused much enthusiasm. If this fantastic riot of colour invites occasional comparison with Dukas’s *L’Apprenti Sorcier*, the result is by no means to the detriment of the British composer, whose death in 1934 was a severe loss to English music.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ No doubt the likes of Vaughan Williams and Boughton experienced this as well.

⁴⁶ “From London Town,” *Morning Bulletin*, July 4, 1923, 14.

⁴⁷ “Dr. Sargent – Brilliant Conducting,” *The Argus*, October 12, 1936, 4.

The Melbourne performance was broadcast, and was reviewed in Sydney.⁴⁸ There was no mention of any aspects of the performance except for the broadcast quality (“Only in *The Perfect Fool* ballet by Gustav Holst did the pianissimo passages fail to emerge clearly at the Sydney end”).

Conclusion

Unlike *The Planets*, the reception and quantity of performances of Holst’s operas in Australia did not mirror their British life. *At the Boar’s Head*, *The Perfect Fool*, and *Savitri* helped cement Holst’s reputation in Britain, and his importance in the renaissance of an ‘English’ musical identity.

Savitri received a consistent and prolonged series of performances in England, widely lauded as the most important contribution to British opera since Purcell.⁴⁹ The premiere on Hammersmith’s smaller stage was received with the optimism of a nation desperately seeking its own compositional style. The work was continually praised for its originality and substance, but ran in to a series of bad performance reviews due to the bigger venue of London such as Covent Garden. There were 8 public performances given from 1921 – 1935 (2 in 1921, 1 in 1923, 2 in 1924, one in 1931, and 2 in 1935), with all the reviews containing the underlying message “a brilliant and important new contribution to British opera, however not suited to this stage.” Unlike *The Planets*, *Savitri* was to gain momentum more for its

⁴⁸ “Music and Drama – Dr. Malcolm Sargent,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 17, 1936, 12.

⁴⁹ Such a run prompts the question of how many other British composers of the time could boast as many performances of their operatic works, and how such a significant contribution could be overlooked in nearly all of the historiographical accounts given of the period.

national importance in the revered and neglected operatic genre as opposed to the work of any particular conductor or promoter. It was at once held up as the best thing since Purcell, and the next step for British opera composition – giving hope to the musical community for future British expeditions in the same vein.

Comparing this to the one and only performance in Australia in 1926, it is hard to see why *Savitri* did not receive a subsequent performance. With such a good review, and its commercial success and interest for the British Music Society, it would appear that staging more performances would have seen similar results (as they did in England). Nonetheless, it is important to analyse *how* the production came to be. It was the direct result of Clive Carey, who actively volunteered to produce and perform it, having been involved in the London productions years earlier. Carey, like Holst, studied composition with Stanford at the Royal College of Music. He entered the RCM in 1901; only 3 years after Holst left, and would without doubt have interacted with Holst not only through College connections, but also on the wider performance stage all throughout the 1910-20s before moving to Australia. With the backing of Louise Hanson-Dyer and the British Music Society in Australia, Carey was able to take *Savitri* from concept through to performance drawing on his experience in the London productions. Unlike its British life, *Savitri* in Australia owed its performance to one man only – Clive Carey – who championed the work and pulled off a great and well-received performance. Why there are no more reports of performances through to the early 1950s is perplexing, as the more accessible ensemble requirements would have been easily manageable for any university or music society to achieve (musical difficulty notwithstanding) – more so than some of the bigger orchestral works such as *The Planets* or *The Hymn of Jesus*.

That *At the Boar's Head* was not performed in Australia, likewise *Sita* (understandably though, as it was an early, almost student work) and *The Wandering Scholar*, while *The Perfect Fool* only found a performance in its Ballet music (not the actual opera) combined with only one performance of the critically acclaimed and brilliantly received *Savitri* is interesting. Clearly Australia was not feeling the same urgency and need to put a British composer back on the opera pedestal! Such a constant message of hope and nationalistic pride had come through the British reception of the operas, and performances were seemingly spurred on by this belief and desire. This did not translate to Australian shores. *Savitri's* performance was a large success – one that can be attributed to the great work (and deep pockets) of Louise Hanson-Dyer in striving for more opportunities for British composers to have a platform in Australia, as well as the championing of the opera by its star and producer Clive Carey. It is quite simple – without Carey, there would have been no performance. He petitioned the British Music Society and Hanson-Dyer to mount the work, travelled from Adelaide to Melbourne and organized the performance. It is strange that something so well received by the audience, and with the measure of commercial success it saw,⁵⁰ that a subsequent performance or run of performances was not produced. In England, it was almost forced – they seemed to want to keep putting *Savitri* on until it broke through. Even *At the Boar's Head* and *The Perfect Fool* were given a spotlight there, while not managing a single performance in Australia. It is important to remember this was Holst, now of *The Planets* fame, being held up by the 'motherland' as the epitome in the genre. The Australian life of Holst's operas then, even though just a passing performance plus a ballet score, owes its small life to its champions.

⁵⁰ Despite likely being underwritten by Louise Hanson-Dyer and having a large base of support from the British Musical Society and its supporters, it is safe to assume that the mass of advertising, large attendance, and success of the critical reception would have carried in to a successful repeated performance, as it had in London.

Chapter 5 – *The Hymn of Jesus*

Holst's *The Hymn of Jesus* was composed in August 1917, and was his first major work produced since completing *The Planets*. In her survey of all of her father's works, Imogen Holst set aside an entire chapter for discussion of the *Hymn*, but the most detailed scholarly attention to the work was Raymond Head's examination in his 1992 article, "The Hymn of Jesus: Holst's Gnostic Exploration of Time and Space."¹ The compositional timeframe led Head to speculate as to whether the work had been written as a philosophical response to World War I, or more a purely artistic endeavour. He noted that many of Holst's friends had fallen in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, yet the correspondence of this period reveals Holst sounding his usual 'chipper' self and does not hint at the depth of emotional turmoil he may have been experiencing.² The answer as to which path inspired the composition remains unknown, yet the end result was a work towering in stature, and both emotionally and musically challenging.³ Imogen Holst noted that, as he usually did, Holst had made his own translation of the hymn from Greek, enlisting the help of his student Jane Joseph – painstakingly copying out each and every word individually from the apocryphal hymn, noting the pronunciation and the literal English translation, before carefully considering the meaning of the words and organising his own version that would meet his needs.⁴

¹ Raymond Head, "The Hymn of Jesus: Holst's Gnostic Exploration of Time and Space," *Tempo Magazine*, no. 209 (1999): 7-13.

² Head (1999), 7.

³ Head (1999), 7.

⁴ Raymond Head also investigated how Holst came across the hymns, noting that "very few Gnostic text had been published or studied; they were generally classed among New Testament Apocrypha." He made the connection with Theosophist G.R.S. Mead, who was in contact and "friendly" with Holst. Head suggested that Mead's translation and commentary of the Hymn (most likely a 1907 publication by the Theosophical Publishing Company) would have been known to Holst. He also noted that Mead gave Holst a copy of an unearthed manuscript discovered in a library in 1897 which was published in the *Apocrypha Anecdota Part 2* (Cambridge University Press, 1899, edited by M.R. James). Holst's translation in 1917 of the original text was a team effort including Jane Joseph, Clifford Bax and also Mead – Imogen Holst's account only mentions Jane Joseph.

Apparently Holst took such care that he even visited a monastery before starting the composition of the music,⁵ to make certain the phrasing was accurate with the two hymns *Pange lingua* and *Vexilla regis*.⁶ In fact, in his usual meticulous style, Holst dug even deeper and not being satisfied with the translations for the plainsong from the English Hymnal,⁷ went back to the Latin versions written by Bishop Venantius Fortunatus in the sixth century. Imogen Holst gave a beautifully incisive overview of her father's approach to writing *The Hymn of Jesus*:

When *The Hymn of Jesus* was first performed the music came as such a shock to those of the listeners who were not prepared to accept such astoundingly unfamiliar religious music. Holst had no use whatever for conventionality: he was utterly free from any routine piety, his memories of the B minor Mass were of ecstasy, his Sanskrit studies had taught him to think beyond the boundaries of Europe, and his idea of Christ included the terrifying unexpectedness of the Byzantine mosaics. It was only natural that he should disregard nineteenth-century oratorio as if it had never existed. Not that he breaks away from all tradition; *The Hymn of Jesus* is built on a foundation of plainsong, but instead of dwelling in a separate modal world language is caught up and transformed in the excitement of his intensely imaginative mind. The impression the music leaves is of overwhelming religious exaltation.⁸

Not everyone would experience this spirit of religious exaltation, as the reception in both Britain and Australia would show. Imogen Holst ended her analysis of the work stating "*The*

⁵ She does not relay the detail of which monastery her father visited for his consultations.

⁶ Both of these are Easter chants found in the Sarum Antiphoner – they were intended for use in Passion Week. Frederick Thomas Bergh, "Sarum Rite." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 13. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13479a.htm> (accessed September 10, 2014).

⁷ "The material for the Prelude is derived from the two plainchants *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt* and *Pange Lingua*. Both of these Easter chants are to be found in the Sarum Antiphoner and were intended for use in Passion Week. In a harmonized form they had appeared (as Nos. 94 and 95) in the 1906 edition of the *English Hymnal*, for which Holst had contributed some new tunes." Head, (1999), 8.

⁸ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 59.

Hymn of Jesus was by far the best work he [Holst] had yet written. The music is great enough to withstand occasional weaknesses when it is heard today. But it lacks unity it might have had if he could combine the mature skill of 1927 with the exuberance of 1917.”⁹ While *The Hymn of Jesus* never approached the popularity or performance appeal of *The Planets*, it nevertheless stands as one of Holst’s significant compositions.

British Reception

Holst’s *The Hymn of Jesus* received considerably fewer performances in England than would be expected given its retrospective stature.¹⁰ Its premiere performance in London was given on June 2 1920, conducted by Holst (Albert Coates conducted the rest of the program) and was reviewed the following day in *The Times*.¹¹ The review stated that the subject matter “is exceedingly difficult to handle throughout in the lofty tone it demands...that it does this is its chief merit.” Speaking to the appeal of the work, the critic noted “the special character of the appeal lies in the strongly held harmonies, which are bound together by a moving bass; and though we do not profess to feel their truth always, there is no doubt about the composer’s doing so.” This moving bass has a strongly ‘Holstian’ sound - it is not unreasonable to speculate that even to an untrained ear listening to the section after the statements of “Glory

⁹ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 63.

¹⁰ This perhaps applies only to the time period discussed in this study - Raymond Head opens his 1999 article stating “*The Hymn of Jesus* has always been one of his most widely performed works.” Raymond Head (1999), 7. The performances outlined here showed an initial run for the *Hymn*, but before the end of the 1920s a critic was already noticing the lack of performances it had received since (“Music at Southwark Cathedral, Kodály and Holst,” *The Times*, February 11, 1929, 17). Head, then, is presumably referring to resurgence in the performances of the *Hymn* later in the twentieth century. Given the pace of Holst’s *Planets* being recorded from the 1960s through to the end of the century, a general lift in Holst performances - especially of his chief works (*The Hymn of Jesus* certainly qualifying in that category) - is probable. While the work would justify standing as a prominent work in its own right, this lift in performances may have been a flow-on effect from the building momentum of *The Planets* from the 1960s onwards.

¹¹ “Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra – Holst and Delius,” *The Times*, June 3, 1920, 14.

to Thee” - the descending bass movement could deceive some into thinking they were listening to “Saturn” from *The Planets*. While there was no mention of the reception or the reaction of the audience to the performance, the reviewer certainly wrote favourably concerning the musical content and its execution.¹² An even more sparkling review was seen after the March 1924 performance at the Queen’s Hall, which noted that Holst “found mysticism between the lines of the Gnostic Hymn and brought beauty out of jargon.”¹³ In discussion about the performance it stated, “Holst’s work, by far the most complicated technically, was well and truly sung,” mentioning that the Philharmonic Choir sang it previously in London and observing that “now that the perilous moments are no longer perilous one realizes how well worthwhile they are.” This is an important issue – just how often the success or failure in the execution of the performance of contemporary music can determine the possible reception (and subsequent performances) of the work. This applied not only to the quality of the given performance but also to the preparation that the chorus had received through rehearsing and giving multiple performances. Often contemporary music received so few performances and was so often under-rehearsed that the work rarely obtained a fair hearing. With Holst’s music being so technically demanding, and his harmonic language and even subject matter being very different to other music emerging from Britain at the time, a good execution of the score would have been particularly important for communicating Holst’s intentions to the public. In this instance, the critic noted just how much of a difference the confidence in performance made for the “perilous moments” and how the music as a whole made more sense and was more worthwhile.¹⁴ The tone of the critic was clearly more confident as well – where he was positive but hesitant in

¹² There would be mention later from Edgar Bainton in Sydney (commenting on this British premiere) that stated that the work was given in the first part of the performance, and that a large number of the audience went to the committee rooms at interval to request a second hearing, which was granted. This would indicate a great reception from the audience. This was not mentioned in the *Times* review however.

¹³ “Philharmonic Choir – Parry, Holst, and Franck,” *The Times*, March 14, 1924, 10.

¹⁴ It is assumed that it was Colles for both reviews, as chief critic commenting on new British music.

the language and tone of the review of the premiere in the June 2 performance, any hesitation had faded along with that of the orchestra on repetition.

A few months later on October 31, *The Hymn of Jesus* was performed at the Norwich Festival and reviewed in *The Times*.¹⁵ This review is quite frank when dealing with Holst's work, using derogatory descriptors such as "Holst's Gnosticism... one must suppose to be a conscious cult. In setting *The Hymn of Jesus* he recreated in music a mystical ritual which has long since lost its power, if it ever had one, to move any part of humanity." This was tempered with the slight concession that "his is, in fact, a brilliantly imaginative effort, but it goes no further." Other works on the program were also described as "all the more a source of purest pleasures in contrast to that other hymn of Jesus which had just preceded Bach's." Holst's idiomatic language did not seem to sit well with this critic to say the least – and from the tone and language it was almost certain that it was not the same critic who reviewed the previous two performances. Perhaps the programming of the *Hymn of Jesus* alongside works of Bach and others highlighted the much more 'modernist' aspect in a light that worked against the piece, or perhaps this particular critic took issue with the Gnostic background of Holst's *Hymn*. The tone used describing it as "that other hymn of Jesus" was pointed and negative, and could show issue being taken on religious grounds. The concession that "his is, in fact, a brilliantly imaginative effort, but it goes no further," also suggests the complaint is really about the text rather than the music. If the critic was an orthodox Christian – particularly strict Anglican or Roman Catholic - the words and associations of the text might have been construed as heresy. It will be important to the understanding of this work and its reception to conduct a small side discussion about the foundational differences between Gnostic and Orthodox Christian texts (below).

¹⁵ "The Norwich Festival – Verdi, Holst, and Bach," *The Times*, October 31, 1924, 14.

Considering the period of these performances (the 1920s), there was an overwhelmingly orthodox Christian belief system in Britain and the transplanted British value system in its Australian Colonial outpost (with no regard for the spiritual beliefs developed over at least the previous 40,000 years by the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land - in what was to become Australia). In the midst of this conservative framework, Gustav Holst had his own spiritual aspirations – a trend with artists of the time – to search for truth and beauty beyond the constraints of their given social system (it was noted earlier that Holst, inspired by Indian philosophy drew on the spiritual texts to be found there in the Vedas and the Mahabharata). His search led him along a pathway inspired by friends and relatives.¹⁶ Holst's exploration of belief systems beyond those of Orthodox Christianity, encompassing Hinduism, Theosophy, Buddhism and practices like astrology, also led him to Gnosticism. Given that this is not a thesis on comparative philosophy, it is difficult to do justice to the background philosophies that influenced Holst, but perhaps a brief summary will allow some insight into the order in which these influences unfolded:

When Holst's mother died in 1882, he was only 8 years of age and his stepmother who was an active Theosophist entered his life and brought with her a Theosophical belief system and circle of friends. It was the Theosophists who rekindled interest in Gnosticism and in particular the belief in received experiential knowledge – but we are running a little ahead of things, and will return to this point shortly. The following year in 1896, Holst encountered a Gnostic text at the hand of a friend. At the time remarkably only a few Gnostic texts were able to be accessed¹⁷ – three codices, the two best known coming from the *Pistis Sophia*¹⁸ (the

¹⁶ Holst's stepmother was the secretary of the local Theosophical Centre in Cheltenham, his friend G.R.S Mead, was at the eye of the storm so to speak, of what was the Theosophical epicentre of the day – the key personality driving the movement being Madam Blavatsky and Mead was her secretary.

¹⁷ There were only a few texts extant because Holst composed the *Hymn of Jesus* long before the 1945 discovery of ancient Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt which revealed a collection of first-hand accounts and lost texts continuing to attract scholarly research to this day. This discovery, which includes the only complete copy of the *Gospel of Thomas*, underpins the centuries old Gnostic myth with sound scholarship. It also highlighted similarities between Gnosticism and other belief systems, notably in the *Gospel of Thomas* which

Testimony of Truth) had survived destruction by the Orthodox Christian church; and Mead, the Theosophist friend of Holst, and Blavatsky's assistant published a version and made it known to Holst.¹⁹ Raymond Head describes the Gnostic text as a manuscript "in its original form dating from the 2nd century or earlier...the earliest surviving...pre-Christian Mystery Ritual" whose authentic message appealed to Holst, with its early date and origin outside of the distorting effects of the established Church.²⁰ Following Mead's lead, Holst was interested in the origins of dance in Church music and searching for truth 'within' rather than 'without' and therefore without church authority and the perceived power that comes with it. Stephan Hoeller explained that Gnostics:

(C)onsidered themselves knowers—*gnostikoi* in Greek—denoting those who have Gnosis or knowledge. Gnostics were people who lived, for the most part, during the first three or four centuries of the so-called Christian era. Most of them probably would not have called themselves by the name Gnostic but would have considered themselves Christians, or more rarely Jews, or as belonging to the traditions of the ancient cults of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome. They were not sectarians or the members of a specific new religion, as their detractors claimed, but rather people who shared with each other a certain attitude toward life. This attitude may be said to consist of the conviction that direct, personal and absolute knowledge of the authentic truths of existence is accessible to human beings, and, moreover, that the attainment of such knowledge must always constitute the supreme achievement of human life.²¹

has resonances with Zen Buddhism – extract from: *Music and the Hermetic Tradition* – Jocelyn Godwin, previously discussed).

¹⁸ Frederik Wisse, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists," in *Vigillae Christianae* 25, no. 3 (September 1971), 205 -223.

¹⁹ Head (1999), 8.

²⁰ Head (1999), 8.

²¹ Stephan A. Hoeller, "The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead," *Quest* (1982), 25.

Hoeller goes on to explain why this set of beliefs is seen as so heretical by Christian opponents and why “it immediately becomes apparent why the Gnostic teaching and practice was radically different from the teaching and practice of Jewish and Christian orthodoxy”²². He explains that the knowledge of the heart, for which the Gnostics strove, could not be acquired by striking a bargain with Yahweh, by concluding a treaty or covenant which guaranteed physical and spiritual wellbeing to man “in exchange for the slave-like carrying out of a set of rules. Neither could Gnosis be won by merely fervently believing that the sacrificial act of one divine man in history could lift the burden of guilt and frustration from one's shoulders and assure perpetual beatitude beyond the confines of mortal existence.”²³

There is more than enough going on here to produce a caustic reaction from commentators within the established church and music systems of the day and the critics who spoke on their behalf.... on this view, you don't need clergy, you do the work yourself, you can touch spirituality within, not waiting for it to be handed down from without and the notions of 'truth' and 'beauty' are to be pursued individually and discovered without paying attention to the concerns of others – music critics or audiences included. So for Holst the *Hymn of Jesus* was not just music-making, but about the pursuit and expression of spiritual truth from an individual perspective and the embodiment of the truth of suffering (necessarily experienced by all mankind in the search for attaining spiritual enlightenment) and attempt to find relief from suffering (the quest of Gnostics, Buddhists and Hindus among others).²⁴ These views, informed by his interest in the Eastern traditions, are wrapped up in his view of the Artist in

²² Hoeller (1982), 25.

²³ Hoeller (1982), 25.

²⁴ See Head (1999), 8-10.

society pursuing beauty and truth regardless of the consequences - given a rare public airing in his talk to the Quest Society²⁵ in 1920 and later published in their journal:

...We are all Mystics, Artists and Philistines...one whose mind is a storehouse of other people's prejudice... All my illustrations in matters of Art will be taken from Music because that is the only form of Art of which I have any real knowledge; but anything that is true of one form of Art, is true of all...Let us risk being absurd and try to express a little of what we feel artists...having fulfilled all ordinary standards of value...transcends them...and reaches to the height...where it needs no comparison or foreign standard of value...where not only is beauty truth, (and) truth beauty, but also, 'that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know'²⁶

So, Holst in support of the Gnostics pursued the idea that salvation can come from knowledge (divine knowledge gained through firsthand experience), completely opposite to Church thinking at the time where it is "by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Unlike Christianity, Gnosticism was based on a mystical, intuitive, subjective, inward, emotional approach to Truth, rather than a Truth that was handed down by an all-knowing being. Hardly surprising then that Holst's *Hymn of Jesus*, based on two Merovingian Latin prayer-poems by Venantius Fortunatus and excerpts from the second century apocryphal Acts of St. John in Holst's own translation, written in 1917 could produce the objections it seemed to at the time.²⁷

²⁵ Mead was also the founder of the Quest Society and before the war it was 'an important meeting place for innovative writers and intellectuals such as W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound (et al)' confirmed by Holst's stepbrother in C.M. Scheer, 'A Direct and Intimate Realization- Holst and Formalism in the 1920's' in *British Music and Modernism 1895-1960* M. Riley (Ed), 111.

²⁶ Holst's quoting of Keats is unsurprising – his poetry clearly resonated with the composer. Five years after the publication of this article, he would turn to Keats for the text used in his First Choral Symphony. Gustav Holst, "The Mystic, the Philistine and the Artist" from *The Quest* 11, no. 3 (April 1920), 366-379, reprinted in Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst, A Biography*, 2nd edition, 194-204.

²⁷ Jean Ballard Terepka, "New York Choral Society and Orchestra – 'Holst and Higdon,'" <http://www.theaterscene.net/ts/articles.nsf/MChoral/D986394E173024C185257CD000218AD8> 5/5/14 (accessed September 17, 2014).

Returning now to the concerts of *The Hymn of Jesus*, the next performance was not given until 1929 in Southwark Cathedral. The report in *The Times* commented on the lack of performances that *The Hymn of Jesus* had received, observing that it was “not to be heard in London just whenever one likes.”²⁸ It continued that, “*The Hymn of Jesus* is not a passionate work, compelling attention by its obvious unity and singleness of mind. None the less it has great qualities... [but] being in its nature a mosaic it needs rather a tight performance to produce the unity of effect which it undoubtedly possesses.” The performance received a good review; however the critic left room for improvement in the conducting of Edgar Cook to produce that ‘tight performance.’ There was no mention of the audience reception in the Cathedral;²⁹ however the tone of the critic’s language hinted at *The Hymn of Jesus* being more readily received than some other works of Holst. Forty years later the tide had turned for another comparative review to contrast the feelings of ‘contemporary’ opinions of the work long after the scope of this thesis. Stephen Walsh of *The Times* spoke of *The Hymn of Jesus* as “Holst’s beautiful hymn,”³⁰ quite the contrast from the Norwich Festival review from October 1924, which could never be accused of thinking the work “beautiful.” Walsh continued, “in the music Holst is at his incisive and economical best,” more a mirror of the common view of Holst’s style from his own time. The sum of these reviews reads much the same as reviews of any other Holst work – a mixed bag, a coin-toss; an illusion that changes with the perspective and bias of the individual – and in this case it appears that it was a 50/50

²⁸ “Music at Southwark Cathedral, Kodály and Holst,” *The Times*, February 11, 1929, 17. This perhaps applies only to the time period discussed in this study - Raymond Head opens his 1992 article stating “*The Hymn of Jesus* has always been one of his most widely performed works.” The performances outlined here show an initial run for the *Hymn*, but before the end of the 1920s a critic was already lamenting the lack of performances it had received since. Head, then, is presumably referring to a resurgence in the performances of the *Hymn* later in the twentieth century. Given the pace of Holst’s *Planets* being recorded from the 1960’s onwards, a general lift in Holst performances, especially of his chief works (*The Hymn of Jesus* certainly qualifying in that category) is probable.

²⁹ The use of a Cathedral as a venue seemed a daring choice for a performance of *The Hymn of Jesus* in the 1920s and 1930s. These were the bastions of religious conservatism, and Holst’s Gnostic Hymn could have (perhaps predictably) offended some. That said, a British review pointed out that various effects in Holst’s Hymn benefitted from the resonant environment that a cathedral provided. “Music at Southwark Cathedral, Kodály and Holst,” *The Times*, February 11, 1929, 17.

³⁰ Stephen Walsh, “Holst and Bruckner in a Glorified Echo Chamber,” *The Times*, July 13, 1974, 9.

between two reviewers with one accepting and supportive of the *Hymn* and one left the other with a bitter taste. Granted, the perspective of the individuals reflects only a part of the story, and the context of the time period also plays a large part.

Australian Reception

Date	Year	State	City	Group	Conductor
May 4	1923	Queensland	Brisbane	Austral Choir	E.R.B. Jordan
November 27	1935	NSW	Sydney	Conservatorium	Edgar Bainton

Figure 5.1 – Australian performances of *The Hymn of Jesus*.

The Hymn of Jesus received just two performances in Australia during the period examined in the scope of this thesis. Holst's new work was first mentioned in the press in Australia in July 1920 in the context of an appraisal of the London musical scene by a recent visitor from Queensland, and was published one month after the London premiere.³¹ The premiere performance was provided with contextual comparison to the contemporary Australian scene:

Mr. Fritz Hart, director of the Albert-street Conservatorium, who returned to Melbourne recently, after a six months' absence in London and Paris, reported a revival in favour of the British school of music, and that Delius was much to the fore through

³¹ "Music and Drama," *The Brisbane Courier*, July 3, 1920, 16.

the production of his “Village Romeo and Juliet,” by Sir Thomas Beecham. Vaughan Williams was taking a good place, and the Royal Philharmonic Society had produced Gustav Holst’s “Hymn of Jesus,” a truly remarkable work. Albert Coates was now conducting the Philharmonic Orchestra and also at Covent Garden, and was regarded as a genius.

Holst’s reputation was steadily growing, and being named here in the company of Delius and Vaughan Williams indicated that he was firmly established as one of the leading British composers going in to the 1920s, and was associated with the British musical renaissance. This report also highlighted many familiar names on the British music scene in both Australia and Britain. It was several years before Holst’s “truly remarkable work” once more received official mention in the Australian sphere, with the Brisbane Austral Choir announcing their intention to perform *The Hymn of Jesus* as part of their subscription series in 1923.³² The article outlined the Austral’s transition from an amateur choir, through to its initial subscription concert series with orchestra – a decision made due to prolonged success in their Eisteddfod work. It was decided that three subscription concerts would be given each year, and that its premiere concert would be devoted to British music - Coleridge-Taylor’s *Hiawatha*, Arthur Bliss’ *Rout*, a *Suite from Purcell* arranged by Albert Coates, and Holst’s *Hymn of Jesus*. The last three works would be receiving the “first performance given in Queensland,” although it would actually be the Australian premiere for Holst’s choral work – a fact that seemingly eluded the author of the preview. Several months later in the advertising immediate before the concert, a much more expansive discussion of *The Hymn of Jesus* was conducted in *The Brisbane Courier*:

The “Hymn of Jesus” (Holst), which is being featured by the Brisbane Austral Choir at its first concert of this year’s series, is a notable modern composition. The

³² “Brisbane Austral Choir: A New Subscription Society,” *The Brisbane Courier*, February 24, 1923, 4.

report of the Carnegie adjudicators upon this work was: - “A notable addition to the choral music of this country. It is strongly original in plan and conception, and expresses with an impressive fidelity the mysticism and the power of the words.” The hymn is the composer’s Op. 37, and is scored for two choruses, semi-chorus, piano, organ, and orchestra. Included in the programme are two old English madrigals, by William Byrd, also the famous “Rout,” by Arthur Bliss. Of this composition a writer has said “When we hear ‘Rout’ we have to contain an impulse to pick up anything handy and join in.” Gustav Holst (formerly “Von Holst”) – he dropped the Von in 1918 – in taking up musical work with the British army in the East, there being no traceable German blood in his descent – was born in 1874. He was trained at the Royal College of Music, studying composition under Sir Charles Stanford, and is now on the staff of that institution as a professor of composition. For some years he has also been engaged as musical director at St. Paul’s Girls School, and at Morley College, an important adult educational centre for working people. In all these positions he has done much to revive the music of the Elizabethans and of Purcell.³³

There overwhelming message that is constant with reading this article – it is all about Holst and the *Hymn of Jesus*. Quite aside from the outline of the music, the extensive biography of Holst (including the explanation of his change of name) strongly stresses his lack of German heritage, portraying him as a British composer of importance to the Australian public. Conspicuously, it is one of the only previews or reviews in the entire Australian study to do so. This might serve to show that the mindset in Queensland was particularly conservative.³⁴

³³ “Music and Drama,” *The Brisbane Courier*, April 28, 1923, 19.

³⁴ Anti-German sentiment was still very high in the 1920s, and a German name might have needed explanation. Place names changed during the war were not changed back for many years – Hahndorf in South Australia was changed to Ambleside in 1917 and not changed back until 1935. Place names were changed in Queensland too around the same period, particularly postal offices. Names that were changed

In stark contrast to the media coverage and introduction given to some of Holst's other works such as *Savitri* and *The Planets*, nothing more seems to have appeared in the press before the review of the actual performance in early May 1923. What the review contained, however, more than made up for the lack of preamble. The critic held nothing back in his disdain of the music and programming, and noted the patriotic angle given to English music:

An audience of gratifying dimensions at the Exhibition Hall last evening was experimented upon by the Brisbane Austral Choir with a programme of entirely modern music; but the innovation can only be regarded as being productive of mixed results. There was a good deal of interest in the various items, but the music on the whole did not make a very successful appeal. There was little that was beautiful to listen to, and less that was likely to compel memories of a lasting and pleasant nature. One's sense of patriotism naturally leads towards a search for what is highest and best in modern British compositions; but it is not too often that the travail results in exultation. The feature of the programme last night was the rendition of Gustav Holst's "Hymn of Jesus," this being its first performance in Australia. Apart from the fact that a theologian would have cause for serious quarrel with the words which are put into the mouth of Christ, the work is not likely to make the appeal which its composer desired. There is no doubt that the author had a good idea at the back of his mind in his conception of this sort of passion music, but the working out left something to be desired. The choir and orchestra were engaged in a perpetual struggle for effect. At times they came near to succeeding, but at others the sound was inclined to

included Bergen (changed to a much more Australian 'Murra Murra'), Bismarck (Neuve), Roessler (Applethorp) and many more. Some were never changed back. Post Office List, <https://www.premierpostal.com/cgi-bin/wsProd.sh/Viewpocdwrapper.p?SortBy=QLD&country=> (accessed October 4, 2014).

jar on a sensitive ear. The crescendos were loud enough in all conscience, but the music was not likely to create religious fervour or establish any tangible faith in the ultra-modern school. The semi-chorus, which was put near the roof, were heard to disadvantage, and found it difficult to keep with the beat. The singers and orchestra worked like Trojans, and so did Mr E. R. B. Jordan, the conductor. It is a pity their vitality was not expended on something more worthy. Two renditions of the work in one night were certainly a trial to the audience. The cantata, “Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast” (Coleridge Taylor), showed both the choir and the orchestra in a more congenial light, and the performance was a credible one... An extraordinary item was Arthur Bliss’s “Rout,” for pianoforte duet and voice. It was also the first performance in Australia, and probably will be its last... The audience were in full agreement long before it was ended. Other far more acceptable items were the Madrigals “Lullaby” and “The Sweet and Merry Month”....³⁵

The language used by the reviewer is rather striking. To actually declare the latter parts of the programme – the works of Byrd – as “far more acceptable” highlighted the conservative mindset of the critic, apparently shared by many of the Brisbane audience, as does lamenting the work of the conductor and ensembles not being spent on something he deemed more worthy. The critic reserved his most sarcastic tone for the Bliss. With the strength and conviction in the language used with interpreting that the audience all felt the same way as he did, it does not require a stretch of the imagination to see how a casual concert-goer may be deterred from attending a subsequent performance as the result of reading such a review. This critic depicts the Holst and Bliss works as rubbish that wasn’t worth the time or effort expended on their rehearsal and performance. The idiom was clearly unfamiliar and the

³⁵ “Brisbane Austral Choir,” *The Brisbane Courier*, May 5, 1923, 11.

discords used by the modern British compositional school must have fallen uncomfortably on ears tuned to the much more tonally-based Germanic symphonic school,³⁶ and its proponents in Britain like the English pastoralists who were considered highly acceptable.³⁷ The critic here clearly found it difficult to adapt to these “ultra-moderns,” and shows his preconceived ideas with the use of his descriptive language. It is probable that at least some of the audience would be approaching this music with the same mindset. There must have been some interest, however, as it is indicated there was a large audience that were at least willing to be “experimented upon,” although again the connotation of that language is very negative. The mention of patriotism is an interesting inclusion. While on the English front, *anything* by British composers was being held up in the desperate quest to establish and promote a distinctly national music, it is an interesting and rare view in the contemporary Australian press if the reviews of Holst’s works in the period under examination are taken as standard for other British composers. The review stated that “it is not too often that the travail results in exultation” – a popular view of contemporary music in a nutshell! The review also hinted that the *Hymn of Jesus* was performed twice (“Two renditions of the work in one night were certainly a trial to the audience”), raising the question if this was in response to audience demand, or a pre-planned move by Jordan. If it was a reaction to applause or requests of the audience, then the critic may well have been alone in their contempt for contemporary British music, however there is only the passing mention of “two renditions” with no reasoning

³⁶ As discussed at the end of Chapter 2, British musicians occupied almost all of the lead positions at Australian Conservatoriums, in a system that was based around that in England and the Continent. The musical public in Australia knew little else, with orchestral programming and general musical sensibilities were more closely aligned to Britain, with an emerging Australian musical self-identity still in its infancy.

³⁷ Kay Dreyfus noted that there were even more aggressive actions taken in Australia following the war to make sure Australia was pro-British only: “Australia turned inwards in the decades following the First World War, which triggered a resurgence of pro-British nationalistic sentiment allied to strong anti-German feelings that became a widespread xenophobia and opposition to “foreigners.” Kay Dreyfus, “The foreigner, the Musician's Union and the state in 1920's Australia : A nexus of conflict,” *Music and Politics* (2009, Vol. 3 No.1), 3. She continued to highlight that this Pro-British anti-everything else mentality went as far as a members of parliament were being lobbied by the Musicians’ Union to immediately repatriate all alien internee musicians at the end of the war from camps in New South Wales.

given.³⁸ The critic emphasised that the *Hymn* was the highlight of the concert due to it being the Australian premiere of the work (as was the Bliss, but this was mostly ignored in comparison). As with the 1924 Norwich Festival review in Britain, the critic here took exception to Holst's Gnostic subject matter. Experimentation by moving away from a widespread accepted orthodox position with any religious conventions - even today - could be met with outrage and criticism. It seems that the conservative contemporary critic in Brisbane in the 1920s was bewildered enough by the harmonic idiosyncrasies of Holst, paired with the heretical use of a Gnostic setting, to take offence. This sort of reaction could well have applied to any audience member in Brisbane during a time where conservative attitudes were prevalent. That being said, it indeed appeared as though this was *not* the automatic reaction from audiences, but more from select individuals such as the Brisbane critic, and that of the Norwich Festival critic the following year in England.³⁹

Over a decade later in 1935, the Australian premiere of *The Hymn of Jesus* was discovered... again! A preview for the second performance stated that the Sydney performance of *The Hymn of Jesus* was an Australian premiere – which of course it was not - that honour going to the Brisbane Austral Choir's performance in 1923. The Brisbane performance must have been overlooked by or unknown to the contemporary Sydney media.⁴⁰ It was Dr. Edgar Bainton at the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music who announced what would be the second performance of the *Hymn of Jesus* as part of their 1935 subscription season.

³⁸ There is mention over a decade later of a story told by Dr. Edgar Bainton of the Philharmonic concert in London premiering the work in the first half of its concert, only to be approached by a large number of the audience at the committee's room at the interval requesting it be performed again in the second half. The people received what they requested and Holst himself had the privilege of hearing the *Hymn of Jesus* twice at its premiere. It would seem that *The Hymn of Jesus* had the privilege of two performances in its premiere in both countries.

³⁹ This view is reinforced by the story relayed previously about an audience-demanded repeat at the London premier. It seems they had not found it a waste of effort, as the Brisbane critic had.

⁴⁰ Certainly the Sydney locals would have considered Brisbane well and truly "out bush" – Queensland would not have counted as a cultural state in popular opinion.

Holst's *Hymn* was set amongst a generous amount of English music, from what was established as British music's epicentre in Australia. A selection of this British music was named in an overview of the 1935 season:

Early next month, Mr. Percy Grainger is to be the soloist in the Delius Pianoforte Concerto, and some music of his own... Apart from the Delius, there is an interesting admixture of the British school. Elgar is represented by his well-known Violoncello Concerto, and his choral piece, "The Music Makers"; John Ireland, by his "Forgotten Rite"; Peter Warlock, by the "Capriole Suite"; Arnold Bax, by his Third Symphony (an important contribution to contemporary English music); Vaughan Williams, by his "Fantasia on a Theme of Tallis"; Balfour Gardiner, by his "To a Comedy" overture; and Gustav Holst, by his much admired choral work the "Hymn of Jesus."⁴¹

It cannot be overestimated just how important the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music was to British music performance in Australia in this period. Holst was named last in this programme announcement, but certainly not least, with the author clearly referencing the British reception in claiming that Holst's *Hymn* was "much admired." Through key leaders such as Arundel Orchard and Edgar Bainton, concert seasons and programmes (like those announced in this preview) were given with much more regularity than might have otherwise been the case under an Australian director with little British interaction. The advertising for the final subscription concert for the New South Wales State Conservatorium Orchestra was constant in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Small advertising notes were conspicuous for the public, listing the "first performance of the Hymn of Jesus," repeated as they often were for one concert or another.⁴² The in-depth coverage began in the "Music and Drama" section of

⁴¹ "Music and Drama – The Conservatorium," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 16, 1935, 10.

⁴² "Conservatorium Orchestra," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 16, 1935, 12.

the newspaper, describing the history of the work and the previously discussed anecdote about the repeat performance given at its London premiere:

ELGAR AND GUSTAV HOLST. There will be two “first Australian performances” at next Wednesday’s concert by the Conservatorium Orchestra and Choir namely, the Violoncello Concerto by Elgar and the “Hymn of Jesus” by Gustav Holst... “The Hymn of Jesus” was first performed by the Royal Philharmonic Society of London in the same year as the [Elgar] Concerto. Following shortly after “The Planets,” which was heard in Sydney under Dr. Arundel Orchard’s regime, this work established Holst’s reputation as a composer of the first magnitude. According to a note supplied by Dr. Edgar Bainton, who will conduct next Wednesday’s performance, “The Hymn of Jesus” appeared in the first part of the Philharmonic concert, and “the impression it created was so striking and profound that, during the interval, large numbers of people quite spontaneously found their way to the committee room, asking for a repeat performance before the conclusion of the concert. The request was granted and the composer had the unique experience of hearing an “encore” performance of his large-scale choral and orchestral work at its initial production.⁴³

This review stated that *The Hymn of Jesus* did the job of cementing the popularity and worth that came to Holst with *The Planets*. Edgar Bainton recounted the story of its great initial reception and subsequent repeat in the Philharmonic Society concert in London indicating he must have been present at the London premiere, or heard the information second hand. Nonetheless, it demonstrated the British connection through Edgar Bainton clearly. The audience would be getting the work as the composer intended it, because Bainton was

“Orchestral Subscription Concert,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 23, 1935, 12.

“Amusements – Orchestral Concert,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 27, 1935, 10.

⁴³ “Elgar and Gustav Holst,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 23, 1935, 12.

apparently present at the premiere conveying a strong sense of authenticity. The review continued this focus, devoting a large portion exclusively to Holst's work:

It is a long time since an orchestral concert at the Conservatorium roused such enthusiasm as that last night. At the end of each of the three major works on the programme – the Elgar Violoncello Concerto, Gustav Holst's "Hymn of Jesus," and Tchaikowsky's fourth Symphony in F Minor – the director, Dr. Edgar Bainton, had to come back several times to the platform, to respond to an ovation.

"The Hymn of Jesus" is a particularly beautiful example of the twentieth century English school of composition. Historical research has played a part in its making: for plain-song emerges very clearly, especially in the introduction, which begins with a trombone solo. What is especially modern is the distinctive way in which the given elements have been combined in a new grouping. Behind a superficial appearance of simplicity, Holst has made extraordinary demands on the choir – for the work is scored for a semi-chorus of women's voices, a chorus, and the orchestra. The individual parts are numerous, and they fit together in unusual combinations. The greater praise must go to last night's singing, therefore, on account of the impression of unfailing lucidity which it gave. Some of the soaring passages for women's voices were of enchanting beauty; and the whole interpretation realised sincerely and surely the deep spiritual quality of Holst's imaginings. The orchestra played its part well, too. Such poignant orchestral phases as the curious swaying figure which ushered in the first vocal flight, and then, a little later, the curious descending scales for 'cellos and double-basses, greatly enriched the total effect.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "Conservatorium – New Orchestral Works," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 28, 1935, 12.

The focus of the review was the British music, but with addition of Tchaikovsky's symphony; the 'established' work having been composed in 1877. This was certainly a far cry from the damning indictment given by the *Brisbane Courier* critic over a decade before. *The Hymn of Jesus* was no longer being depicted as a waste of effort for the group producing it, but instead appreciated for its beauty and spiritual gravitas. The audience embraced the work and its performance with an ovation, also afforded to the other works on the programme. The critic's appraisal of the construction of *Hymn* is very similar to Imogen Holst's account rendered in *The Music of Gustav Holst*, highlighting the use of plainsong, and the deceptive difficulty hidden behind Holst's apparently simple and fluid writing. Unlike many performances of Holst's works in both Britain and Australia, the review of this performance outlined the sterling work of both the orchestra, and in particular the chorus in navigating the difficulties in the harmony.⁴⁵ *The Hymn of Jesus* was held up by this critic as "a particularly beautiful example of the twentieth century English school of composition," a stark contrast from the critic in Brisbane more than a decade previously. It could have been that the performance in Sydney was just more expertly executed by the performers, or the conductor's interpretation brought the music alive, or that the critic was just more open to Holst's style. It may also have been the difference of time – Given ten more years, the work may not have been as 'experimental' as it had been in the repertoire when it was first heard.

It is interesting to have found that Holst's *Hymn of Jesus* seemingly had a direct impact on another composer. There was a reference to Holst's *Hymn* in a review Edgar Bainton's *Hymn to God the Father* (1926) found the year after the Sydney performance:

⁴⁵ Reviewers, particularly in Britain and for Holst's operas, were always quick to point out the technical difficulty of his vocal writing as justified insecurity in a performance and subsequently why a performance may not have been particularly good.

... a first performance here of Dr. Bainton's own "Hymn to God the Father." This proves to be work of some eloquence and not a little beauty... It was interesting to compare this work with the more rich and subtle effects which Gustav Holst aims at in his "Hymn of Jesus." Here, again, the score exactly fits the text, which is based on the apocryphal Gospels, "The Acts of St. John."⁴⁶

The reviewer points out the similarities and comparisons in Bainton's *Hymn to God the Father* with Holst's earlier work. Clearly Holst's idiosyncratic style was making an impact on the composers around him, and with the shifting harmonic expectations in the early twentieth century, some of his previously labelled 'experimental' harmony was becoming more and more accepted, and even mainstream after his death. Bainton's work was composed almost a decade after Holst's *Hymn* (and before he conducted it in Australia), but there could be little doubt that Bainton would have been exposed to Holst's work in Britain prior to 1926.

Conclusion

Holst's *Hymn of Jesus* had a similar performance life and reception in Australia compared with Britain. The most prominent aspect that can be noted in both countries is the paucity of performances of a work that today is viewed as one of Holst's major works. With just four performances found in Britain over one decade in the 1920s, and a mere two in Australia separated by twelve years, it was clearly not the popular phenomenon that *The Planets* had been during the same period, and also unlike the sensation of *The Planets* in the orchestral repertoire, the work has not become a mainstay of choral repertoire today. The critics may

⁴⁶ "Orchestral Concert – Composition by Dr. Bainton," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 10, 1936, 14.

have been able to take issue with some of Holst's musical effects in *The Hymn of Jesus*, and of course his idiosyncratic compositional language was ever-present, but it was not *that* far departed from the work that was composed immediately before it – *The Planets*. The “Prelude” section of *The Hymn of Jesus* could almost be seen as hybrid combination of *Venus* and *Neptune* with the similar ebbing and flowing of harmony, and after the “Glory to Thee” statements from the choir, the descending figure seems almost a direct quotation and effect from “Saturn.”⁴⁷ That Holst had applied his voice to a religious subject (well, one recognised in the Western world instead of his usual Indian inspiration...) might be reason for some conservative critics to take issue - as had the critic in Brisbane in 1923, or the Norwich Festival critic in England in 1924. A more likely explanation is that this work really does require an incredibly solid performance from all quarters to convey its effectiveness and value. Unsure, nervous, and bad performances of Holst's music had been proffered as reasons why a work was not well received previously,⁴⁸ and that continued here. Without solid direction and the ‘tightness’ of performance described by critics, *The Hymn of Jesus* could seem a patchwork of disorganised ideas. It might simply have been that the 1923 Brisbane performance was just not of a standard to do the composition justice, and thus gave the critic ample ammunition with which to produce the review he did, or it might have been that the content and compositional language was just too much for Brisbane at that point in time. It was certainly received well in Sydney in the 1935 performance, but in spite of this no subsequent performances appear to have occurred in the period encompassed by this study.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The pizzicato figure of the double basses and cellos at bar 28 of “Saturn.”

⁴⁸ Holst's operas in Britain are a prominent example of this, with critics continuously noting that smaller spaces were required in their reviews. This is also something that must have frustrated Holst to no end – he specifically stated such performance directions on the score, while performances in England continued to stage it as any other full-scale operas.

⁴⁹ Evidence for the next performance outside the scope of this study does not appear until August 1993, in an announcement of an upcoming Canberra Choral Society concert. W. Hoffmann, “Program will feature choral masterpieces,” *The Canberra Times*, August 2, 1993, 20. It would be surprising if there were not other unreviewed performances anywhere in Australia during that long period.

Bainton was continuing his championing of Holst, having earlier performed Holst's *Planets* with New South Wales State Conservatorium - Holst's music being featured there prominently over the previous 15 years and both directors to that date having had a close relationship with Holst. E.R.B. Jordan was almost solely responsible for the Brisbane performance occurring in 1923. His knowledge of Holst and the work would have been the only way that the piece found its way to a relatively remote location (in terms of contemporary British music) at the time. Given the large orchestra and choral requirements of *The Hymn of Jesus*, the difficulty of a production can be highlighted as a possible reason for the lack of performances found (especially around the time of the Great Depression and Second World War). Acknowledged as being one of his most significant works by the small group of scholars analysing and publishing on Holst's music, *The Hymn of Jesus*, a profound Gnostic exploration of time and space, did not receive the attention in either Britain or Australia in the first half of the twentieth century it deserved, and would only later find.

Chapter 6 – Four Songs for Voice and Violin

Holst's *Four Songs for Voice and Violin* op 35 is a work as economical as the title suggests. Written during 1916 and 1917, and published in 1920, these four songs are a total contrast to the large orchestral works Holst was penning at the time, namely *The Planets* and *The Hymn of Jesus*. The only resources called upon are a solo violin and a single voice.¹

Holst was inspired to compose this work utilising the sparse combination after he found himself inside the church at Thaxted one evening, where he observed one of his Morley College students, Christine Ratcliffe, singing a wordless song and improvising an accompaniment on the violin as she wandered between the empty aisles.² According to the historical society for Thaxted, Holst had originally hoped that Ratcliffe would perform the work herself but she could not articulate the words whilst playing the violin, and it has since always been performed by two people, a singer and a violinist.³ The text for the Four Songs were taken from *A Medieval Anthology* by Mary Segar,⁴ and seemed to suit the composer whose practical study of Purcell, according to his daughter, had helped him to an understanding of English word setting.⁵ The score of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin might seem approachable for the amateur musician, but Imogen

¹ The First Edition merely notes "Voice" on the upper stave. There have been recordings made with every voice type. Holst, with his focus on practicality at all times, surely would have deliberately marked voice on the score with hope that any singer would approach it.

² Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 129.

³ "The Foxearth and District Local History Society – I Ring for the General Dance: Gustav Holst and Thaxted," www.foxearth.org.uk/holst.html (accessed April 21, 2014).

⁴ Mary Segar, *A Medieval Anthology, Being Lyrics and Other Short Poems Chiefly Religious* (London: Longmans, Green and Jo., 1915).

⁵ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 57.

Holst cautions: “there is nothing for amateurs in the *Four Songs for voice and violin*: the extreme economy of the writing makes the most exacting demands on the singer and the player.”⁶

The four songs have very different characteristics – the first, “Jesu Sweet,” captures an improvisatory essence whilst maintaining a recitative style. This song seems to recall what Holst had heard initially in the church at Thaxted, being improvisatory at heart. In this Aeolian mode first song, the violin provides an introduction and links between the rhythmically free phrases of the voice part. “My soul hath nought but fire and ice” is in a transposed Phrygian mode, vestigially accompanied, and followed by “I sing of a maiden,” again in the Aeolian mode. The set ends with “My Leman is so True,” a Phrygian setting in which the vocal line is accompanied by a violin counter melody, ending with an E major chord. This fourth song is a symbiosis between the music and words so successful that it prompted Holst to label it the nearest he had yet come to the musical idiom of the English language.⁷

The Four Songs in Britain

Five reviewed performances of Holst’s *Four Songs for Voice and Violin* were found in Britain. An article in *The Musician* with a brief analysis of the songs was presented at the

⁶ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 57.

⁷ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 57.

beginning of February in 1921 (shortly after the first performance review was found),⁸ but nothing in it mentioned any performances or the reception of the work.⁹ The Four Songs never seemed to have gained a foothold, with several unconvincing performances being cited as the culprit by critics. The Oriana Madrigal Society twice programmed the work in their Christmas concerts at the Aeolian Hall, given between choral works.¹⁰ There was a discussion by Herbert Antcliffe after the first four performances in 1925, but the Four Songs were merely referenced.¹¹

The Four Songs for Voice and Violin would receive a consistent run of performances in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century, demonstrated with the overview below:

⁸ Arthur Newson, "A Musical Experiment: Holst's Mediaeval Songs for Voice and Violin," *The Musician* 18 (February 1921), 120.

⁹ The Four Songs are discussed by John Rutland as part of a broader analysis on the violin and voice combination – examined alongside Vaughan William's *Along the Field* and Rebecca Clarke's *Three Old English Songs*. This discussion is analytical, however, and any detailed comments about the inception of the work and its history is taken exclusively from Imogen Holst's *The Music of Gustav Holst*, and is surrounded by a very brief general biographical history of Holst.

¹⁰ In all of these reviews, the actual soloists were never discussed. It can be presumed that one of the choir members would have presented the Holst Songs.

¹¹ There was a survey of British song composers, 1914-1924, which included a discussion of Holst's *Hymns from the Rig-Veda*, which was cited as an outstanding example of the "half-accompanied" song style. There was also a passing reference later in the article to Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin – but there is nothing of significance to be found. Herbert Antcliffe, "A Decade of English Song," in *Musical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (April 1925): 219-230.

Date	Year	State	City	Group	Performer
November 11	1921	Victoria	Melbourne	British Music Society	Lilian Stott (Singer) Isabel Langlands (Violin)
July 7	1925	Queensland	Brisbane	Recital	Doreen Morgan (Singer) Eric Hayne (Violin)
November 6	1931	Queensland	Brisbane	Austral Choir	Ralph Moffat (Singer) Morris Cran (Violin)
October 26	1933	Western Australia	Perth	Recital	Zoe Lenegan (Singer) Robert Gibson (Violin)
May 31	1934	Victoria	Melbourne	Melbourne Music Club	Lilian Stott (Singer) and Elise Steele (Violin)
September 11	1936	Western Australia	Perth	Modern French Library	Zoe Lenegan (Singer) Zipah Feldman (Violin)
October 19	1936	New South Wales	Sydney	British International Music Society	Phyllis Burnard (Singer) Vaughan Hanley (Violin)
July 3	1939	New South Wales	Sydney	British International Music Society	Ruth Pearce Jones (Singer) Ines Lang (Violin)
August 31	1939	Western Australia	Perth	Recital	Zoe Lenegan (Singer) J.W. Glassford (Violin)
September 13	1939	New South Wales	Sydney	Sydney Conservatorium of Music	Ruth Pearce Jones (Singer) Ines Lang (Violin)
March 15	1941	Western Australia	Perth	Kylie Club	Lorna McKean (Singer) Vaughan Hanly (Violin)
December 8	1945	New South Wales	Sydney	Chamber Music Concert	Thelma Arlom (Singer) Lionel Lawson (Violin)
February 16	1946	Western Australia	Perth	Kylie Club	Lorna McKean (Singer) Vaughan Hanly (Violin)
April 4	1946	Western Australia	Perth	Adult Education Board	Lorna McKean (Singer) Vaughan Hanly (Violin)
March 18	1952	Western Australia	Perth	W.A. Chamber Music Society	Lorna McKean (Singer) Vaughan Hanly (Violin)

Perth	Sydney	Brisbane	Melbourne
7 Performances	4 Performances	2 Performances	2 Performance

Fig. 6.1 – Australian Performances of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin.

The Four Songs in Australia

The premiere performance of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin in Australia was given at the inaugural British Music Society meeting held at Louise Hanson-Dyer's residence "Torryburn" in Melbourne's Hawthorn on November 10, 1921. Lilian Stott was the singer and Isabel Langlands the violinist.¹² The review gave an overview of what the British Music Society was, who was involved, and notably, who was present at this meeting and performance.¹³ The Holst work was described as "four admirable songs for voice and violin," and it was noted that the audience of musicians reacted well to good performances of all the works. It is important to note that many significant people in Melbourne's music scene attended and were exposed to Holst's work (and Dunhill's Romance" and "Scherzo" from his D minor Sonata) as well as English madrigals, sung by members of the choir at the Albert Street Conservatorium – no doubt offered by Fritz Hart, its Director. Nellie Melba was present, as were two leaders of the Royal Victorian Liedertafel (Louise Hanson-Dyer's husband James was its president, and Mansley Greer was its conductor), as well as A.E. Floyd. Floyd was organist at St. Paul's Cathedral and would organise for some of Holst's choral music to be performed as will be discussed later. There was clearly exposure for the Four Songs to the leaders on Melbourne's music scene.

¹² Lilian Stott studied at the Melba Conservatorium in the early 1930s, and was chosen, of all the possible people for the occasion, to sing the solo part of Mendelssohn's "O for the Wings of a Dove" at Dame Nellie Melba's funeral service on February 26, 1931. "Melba – Funeral To-day," *The Argus*, February 26, 1931, 7.

¹³ "Music Week," *The Argus*, November 14, 1921, 8.

Four years would pass before the next performance of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin Op 35 was given, when it was performed in Brisbane in 1925. It was the soprano Doreen Morgan who performed the Songs at the Albert Hall on Albert Street in Brisbane on July 7 that year. There were two identical preview advertisements found the week before the performance in *The Brisbane Courier*,¹⁴ which provided background to Doreen Morgan's recent vocal study:

Miss Doreen Morgan's recital will be held in the Albert Hall, Albert-street, on July 7, at 8 p.m. This is Miss Morgan's first recital since her return from a highly successful course at the Melba Conservatorium, Melbourne, where she obtained her associateship with honours. Besides her French, Italian, and English groups, Miss Morgan will sing, to Mr. Eric Hague's violin accompaniment, Gustav Holst's "Four Songs for Voice and Violin," which have, not been heard in Brisbane before. The assisting artists will be Mr. Eric Hayne (violinist) and Mr. Archie Day (pianist).

It would seem that the highlight of the performance was set to be the Holst premiere, as it was mentioned individually even though an "English group" was mentioned. The day after the performance was given, the review appeared in the newspaper:

Miss Doreen Morgan, the popular Brisbane soprano, was greeted by a crowded house at her recital at the Albert Hall last night, and was the recipient of many floral tributes from admiring friends. She was in her best voice, and introduced her audience to some charming songs. She sang the first group, "Mandoline" (Debussy), "Les Papillons" (Chaussons), "Aimant la Rose" (Rimsky-Korsakov) and "Aubade" (Lalo), in French; the second group consisted of four delightful

¹⁴ "Miss Doreen Morgan's Recital," *The Brisbane Courier*, June 29, 1925, 10.
 "Doreen Morgan's Recital," *The Brisbane Courier*, June 30, 1925, 9.

old songs for voice and violin by Gustav Holst, Mr. Eric Hayne playing the accompaniment.¹⁵

This was certainly an altogether positive review. A ‘crowded house’ at the Albert Street Hall would have contained around 450 people,¹⁶ which showed a great amount of interest in the concert.¹⁷ This was most likely due to Doreen Morgan’s hometown popularity and support, but there must have been some interest in the program mentioned in the previews to the concert to attract that many. The reviewer’s choice of adjectives is the only hint at how the Four Songs for Voice and Violin were received in the performance. Even though specific audience reception was not mentioned, the Holst songs were described as “delightful old songs” showing that they were enjoyed - by the critic at least!¹⁸ The critic here seemed to have taken the modal sound of the Four Songs and declared them ‘old.’ Doreen Morgan would most likely have come into contact with this work during her study at the Melba Conservatorium in Melbourne, with both Fritz Hart (a great Holst ally and friend) and Dame Nellie Melba, described as Hart’s “extravagantly pro-British ally”¹⁹ heavily involved during both the period and the institution as a whole, with the legacy of “pro-British” music.²⁰

¹⁵ “Doreen Morgan Recital,” *The Brisbane Courier*, July 8, 1925, 16.

¹⁶ “Brisbane Theatre History,”

http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/siryan/academy/theatres/Bris_AlbertHall.htm (accessed September 8, 2012).

¹⁷ There were two Albert Street Halls – the original situated in Adelaide Street opened in 1881 and ceased being used for concerts and theatre after being sold and used as a post office in 1899. The second Albert Hall (the hall spoken about in this review) opened in 1901 in a different location. Its design at that point allowed a capacity audience of 450 people, which would eventually be extended to 720 seats in 1940.

“Brisbane Theatre History,”

http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/siryan/academy/theatres/Bris_AlbertHall.htm (accessed September 8, 2012).

¹⁸ Lena Hammond, who would be prominent on the Australian choral scene and performing Holst’s music, had accompanied Doreen Morgan in other concerts in Brisbane.

¹⁹ Thérèse Radic, “Hart, Fritz Bennicke,” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*,

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hart-fritz-bennicke-6589/text11341> (accessed January 15, 2014).

²⁰ There is no definitive evidence to support the suggestion that Doreen Morgan learned the Four Songs at the Melba Conservatorium, however there is a high circumstantial probability.

The 1930s contained a string of performances of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin. The first of these performances was given in an Austral Choir concert in Brisbane (conducted by E.R.B. Jordan), on November 6, 1931 in the Teachers Conference Hall. There was an absence of notification in the press leading up to this concert, with only a review found to evidence that the performance took place.²¹ Aside from the Holst, composers such as Brahms, Mussorgsky, Bridge and Bantock provided variation in the program, including Schubert's Trio in E flat op. 100 and Grainger's Youthful Romance for small orchestra. The violinist Morris Cran and singer Ralph Moffat performed the Four Songs for Voice and Violin. There was no mention of the reception of the works, just the occasional praise of the performance of a particular work. The critic stated, "The whole of the music selected for performance was interesting." A curious feature of this performance was the number of English pieces programmed. The programming would likely have been E.R.B Jordan's work, although one could only speculate if Moffat, Cran, or both had already played the Holst on a prior occasion.

The next performance was given at the Karrakatta Club Hall in Perth, Western Australia on October 25, 1933. The review, appearing the following day in *The West Australian* was very positive:

Finely artistic singing, in which the singer's exceeding charm of voice and ease of production played a big part, was offered by Miss Zoe Lenegan in a recital at the Karrakatta Club Hall last night. Her programme, too, was an uncommonly interesting one, with not a hackneyed item in it; nor one, as it happened, that could be said to lie outside her range (speaking in terms of style and character). With smooth, gentle beauty she invested some old French songs, gravely sweet for the most part. To these succeeded a very arresting Scandinavian folk song ("The boats

²¹ "Austral Recital," *The Brisbane Courier*, November 7, 1931, 16.

are homeward coming') in which the note of restrained pathos was sounded with the complete simplicity needed; followed by two old English ditties of greater movement and happier nature, 'The Sprig of Thyme' and 'My Johnny was a Shoe maker.' A remarkable inclusion was Gustav Holst's four settings of religious poems from an anthology of medieval writings, for voice and violin (without piano). With these sensitive songs Miss Lenegan was very successful. The mood of quiet exaltation she attained in the first, 'Jesu, sweet, now will I sing to thee,' and the sweet tenderness voiced in 'I sing of a maiden' — verses, by the way, which have been heard in Perth lately in Quilter's setting for voice and piano — were particularly eloquent. In response to the applause, the first was repeated. Mr. Robert Gibson played the violin part, which is sometimes a counter-melody in single notes, sometimes a succession of chords, with once or twice a harmony sustained over several lines of the song. In a group of modern English songs Stanford's 'The Monkey's Carol' was a notably attractive item. Its companions were Bantock's 'Island of Pines' (one of his Chinese settings) and Coleridge Taylor's 'O What Comes Over the Sea.'²²

The tone and language of the critic reflect positively not only on the execution of the performances, but also the approval of the musical content of the works. This extremely positive review captured the reception of the work in great detail. The “remarkable inclusion” of Holst’s “sensitive songs” proved exceptionally popular, with the first of the four repeated after what must have been excessive applause. The commentary of the violin’s relationship to the voice shows more care reporting what was clearly the highlight of the program. Once more, it is interesting to note the variety of English music

²² “Artistic Singing,” *The West Australian*, October 26, 1933, 10.

that was being presented. Quilter, Bantock, Stanford, and Coleridge Taylor were also represented in this concert.

The remaining performances of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin occurred after Holst's death in 1934. The next performance was a mere week after Holst's passing, on May 31, 1934. The review of the performance went into some detail:

The tragic death last week of Gustav Holst gave special and pathetic significance to the renderings of the composer's "Four Songs for Voice and Violin," heard last night at the Lyceum Club, when, under the auspices of the Melbourne Music Club, an attractive programme of vocal and instrumental items was presented by Miss Lilian Stott and Miss Elise Steele. Both musicians displayed unfailing appreciation of Holst's essentially austere passion. The curiously reluctant harmonies and the alternately virile and reticent rhythms were sensitively realised. The soprano's tone in the example, "My soul has naught but fire and ice," and again in the haunting "Jesu, Sweet, now will I sing to Thee," had the requisite depth and sonority....²³

The language the critic used to describe the performance was universally strong, with items described as "beautifully treated" with "grave distinction" and "haunting," among other terms. The Holst was highlighted and discussed, and while the performance was 'sensitively realised,' the recent death of Holst might have given motive for the critic to focus on this work. The programme presented was varied and was a contemporary showcase, with composers like Szymanowski, Ravel and Hamilton Harty presented to the Melbourne public. While the review is very positive for the Holst, it is at home among

²³ "Melbourne Music Club – Songs by Holst and Hamilton Harty," *The Argus*, June 1, 1934, 12.

many other positive reflections on other works with equally strong language, with only a few polite hints at some unsure renditions of works like the Harty.

The Four Songs for Voice and Violin were also performed in the context of a vocal lecture in Perth.

An interesting talk on “How to Sing,” with illustrations, was given by Miss Zoe Lenegan, at a meeting at the Modern French Library, Sheffield House, yesterday. Miss Lenegan illustrated her remarks by examples of vocal production, and at the close sang some interesting numbers for voice and violin by Gustav Holst, the words of which were taken from a medieval anthology, Miss Zipah Feldman playing the violin.²⁴

How much of a ‘performance’ this counts for is debatable. It is not clear if all four songs were performed, or just two or three as a demonstration. This was also a meeting at a library, with no mention of the attendance or reception of the Holst. All that we can ascertain is that this reviewer found the Four Songs for Voice and Violin ‘interesting.’

A preview for a concert by The British and International Music Society appeared in the Sydney press a month later:

The British and International Music Society will hold a concert at the Forum Club on Monday October 19. The Program will consist of vocal and

²⁴ “A Lecture on Singing,” *The West Australian*, September 12, 1936, 13.

instrumental numbers, included being songs for voice and violin by Gustav Holst.²⁵

Even though extremely brief, the importance of a preview such as this is in the highlighting of Holst's music. Out of the entire program, singling out that Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin would be performed, as a drawcard, indicated that the work (or the composer at least) must have been known and well received. The review of that October 19 concert appeared the following day, and was notable for its content:

The British and International Music Society has done much good work in bringing forward new music or music by modern composers, which is seldom played. In last night's programme, at the Forum Club, five new songs by Australian composers (David Cox and Dr. Alexander Burnard) and two instrumental works by the Italian "modernist," Castelnuovo-Tedesco, were submitted, together with more familiar music by John Ireland and Gustav Holst.

Mr. Vaughan Hanley (violin) and Mr. Frank Warbrick (pianoforte) proved a highly capable ensemble in John Ireland's "Violin and Pianoforte Sonata in A Minor," a freely moving work, of which the slow movement proved very melodious and enjoyable. Elsewhere, the sonata, though so well played, seemed to be more voluble than eloquent... There was charm and some originality in two songs by David Cox, a composer aged 19, and much resource was displayed in three others by Dr. Burnard. "Into the Woods My Master Went" (David Cox) had real melodic value, and "Ghosts," by Dr. Burnard, was notable for a well-devised accompaniment. Mrs. Phyllis Burnard sang the

²⁵ "British and International Society," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 10, 1936, 12.

group with complete understanding, and also combined with Mr. Hanley in Gustav Holst's "Five [sic] Songs for Voice and Violin."²⁶

By this time, two years after Holst's death in the 1934, his music was being described as 'more familiar' than contemporary Australian music. Obviously not too familiar, however, as the critic incorrectly reports that there were "Five" Songs for Voice and Violin performed, inventing one out of thin air! After being singled-out in the preview for the concert, the Holst songs did not receive any further treatment in the review, except for the incorrect title and the performers who rendered the work.²⁷ There was no indication of the audience reception, or even of the execution of the work in the case of the Holst.

The next performance of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin was given again in Sydney by the British and International Music Society three years later in 1939. A short preview appeared in the media, where Holst appeared among a list of composers.²⁸ The review was in the newspaper the day after the performance:

Frank Bridge's Quartet in E Minor was performed by the Sydney Ladies' String Quartet at the Forum Club last night, as part of a concert of modern music given by the British and International Music Society... Ruth Pearce-Jones [sic] revealed a well-modulated and flexible soprano in a group of songs by Gustav Holst.

Although her style is cultured, the rich poetry of this music was not always fully

²⁶ "British Music Society," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 20, 1936, 16.

²⁷ Perhaps this was an accident, confused with the "Five new songs" by Australian composers mentioned earlier in the review, or (worryingly for a critic), the adagio section in the *Intermezzo* may have been mistaken as an individual 'song.'

²⁸ "British and International Music," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 1, 1939, 10. "The next concert of British and international music will be held at the Forum Club on Monday, at 8:15 pm, when works by Frank Bridge, Gustav Holst, Elgar, Richard Strauss, and Joseph Mars will be given by the Sydney Ladies' String Quartet, Ruth Pearce Jones, and Ines Lang.

expressed in her singing. There was greater warmth later in her singing of two songs by Marx.²⁹

This was the second concert organised under the auspices of the British and International Music Society, with Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin had been programmed. The critic, who made note that poetry in the music wasn't always well handled by Ruth Pearce Jones, received this performance with hesitant praise. Again, no mention is made of how works on the programme were received by the audience present, just that the music of the Four Songs was thought of as 'rich poetry.'

The following month, another recital by Zoe Lenegan in Perth contained Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin. Clearly by now the Holst was established in her repertoire. A preview by "Fidelio" in *The West Australian* outlined what was to be played.³⁰

A vocal recital by Miss Zoe Lenegan is to take place in the Burt Memorial Hall on Thursday evening next. Among other things Miss Lenegan will sing a group of love-songs by Elizabethan composers, Gustav Holst's four songs for voice and violin and a French set by Nerini...

It is worth noting that Holst's Four Songs were being regularly highlighted in previews for upcoming recitals. This preview was five years after Holst's death, so the merit of the work itself and the composer's heightened reputation are solely responsible for the highlighting, and not any memorial sentiments. The review for the performance read:

A good house at the Burt Memorial Hall showed warm appreciation of Miss Zoe Lenegan's recital last night.... Miss Lenegan gave a group of songs by Gustav

²⁹ "Concert at Forum Club," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 4, 1939, 16.

³⁰ "Music and Theatre," *The West Australian*, August 26, 1939, 8.

Holst, written with only a violin accompaniment. They were "Jesu, Sweet," "My Soul is Nought but Fire and Ice," "I Sing of a Maiden," and "My Leman is so True." Apart from the singer's rendering, one was captivated by the violin accompaniment, not only because that is unusual, but rather because it seemed so complete despite the limitations of the instrument, the composer having used the devices of counter-melody, double-stopping and broken chords with good effect. There followed an attractive bracket of "Chansons Breves" translated by Emile Nerini....³¹

Ruth Pearce Jones gave a concert on September 13, 1939 with the Sydney Conservatorium Quartet, which included "songs by Debussy and Gustav Holst."³² Though this 'review' consists of just 4 lines, and mentions nothing except the works played and the statement above, due to the previous performances of the work by Ruth Pearce Jones with the Four Songs for Voice and Violin, it is fair to assume that these were the "songs" mentioned. There is no mention of reception, comment on the works, or any other information.

Members of the Kylie Club in Perth gave the next performance on March 15, 1941. The review by "Fidelio" appeared on the March 18 and focussed entirely on the Four Songs for Voice and Violin:

So habituated are modern listeners to solo singing backed by full harmonic dress of keyboard or orchestra that were someone to raise his voice in our concert halls, unaccompanied, in the manner of the folk-singer, it would succeed only in disconcerting most of us, probably. Not so drastic an experience, but one some distance removed from the usual was offered members of the Kylie Club on

³¹ "Miss Zoe Lenegan's Art," *The West Australian*, September 1, 1939, 7.

³² "Conservatorium Quartet," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 15, 1939, 3.

Saturday afternoon, when Miss Lorna McKean and Mr. Vaughan Hanly presented Gustav Holst's four songs for voice and violin.

This beautiful music makes its mark and gives us delight by its directness of expression and the sense of adequacy the composer has been able to convey by masterly handling of a simple, limited means. The words are medieval religious poems, for which Holst, always most careful for just treatment of the language, has found vocal lines moving unfettered by time-signature, and companioned in gentle comradeship by the violin. The instrument sometimes sings a complimentary melody, sometimes sustains long notes below the voice. The sensitive skill brought to their performance by the artists named had wholly admirable results. They made other excellent contributions also, the soprano singing charmingly some seldom-heard Mozart, and the violinist giving a first-rate performance of a fine sonata by Tartini. Miss Nora Coalstad accompanied.³³

The first paragraph of this review discussed how the contemporary audiences were accustomed to the 'normal' presentation of a vocalist. As usual, Holst disregarded convention, and his choice of a solo violin accompaniment for the voice is in part why the music is so arresting. The point is made this is *not* the norm for the Perth audience, but it is not sufficiently different enough to be disconcerting or off-putting either. The same could be said of almost all of Holst's compositional output. Holst's skill in expression through economy is discussed in the second paragraph, something found in many reviews in both Britain and Australia throughout the 1920s and 1930s. While the reception of the work by the audience is not mentioned in the review, the quality of the performance is noted as producing good results. This was also the longest press coverage given to the Four Songs in the first half of the century.

³³ "Voice and Violin - Setting of Medieval Verses," *The West Australian*, March 18, 1941, 3.

A performance review by Neville Cardus appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on December 10, 1945 after a chamber music concert featuring Edgar Bainton, and the violinist Lionel Lawson on December 8.³⁴

He [Lionel Lawson] was himself in the afternoon's most distinguished contribution – a beautiful interpretation of Gustav Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin, in which Thelma Arlom was the vocalist. She sang with a rare intensity of tone, not technically elaborate, but warmed by imagination that responded to the pure mysticism of the words and the music. Holst makes an original and harmonious blending of violin harmony and voice – and it is not only a tonal but a spiritual harmony. These songs, so grossly neglected, are the fine fruits of an artist who had no vestige in him of commonness or fashionable banality.

While brief, this review is interesting for its reflection on the composition itself, Holst in general, as well as the tone and language Cardus utilized. The Four Songs for Voice and Violin, while one of the most widely performed works of Holst in Australia within the scope of this thesis, are described by Cardus as grossly neglected, a label that could surely be applied to most of Holst's other works, and of course those of most contemporary composers (both then, and today). The Four Songs were also highlighted with the description of being the “most distinguished contribution” of the performance. It is also interesting to note an opinion that is not often acknowledged, that Holst was “an artist who had no vestige in him of commonness or fashionable banality.” This sort of assessment is found in Imogen Holst's accounts of her father, and by some of Holst's close friends, but is otherwise absent from the contemporary press.

³⁴ Neville Cardus, “Chamber Concert - Violin and Voice,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 10, 1945, 5.

The following February, another performance by the husband and wife team of Lorna McKean and Vaughan Hanly was given in a concert under the auspices of the Kylie Club. A short preview note highlighted the Holst work and that it was to be the first concert of the year for the ensemble.³⁵ Sadly, no review of this performance was able to be located in any of the Western Australian newspapers. It would not be long before McKean and Hanly would once again grace the Perth concert rooms with the Four Songs for Voice and Violin. Just over a month later on April 4, the pair performed in an Everyman's concert. The preview listed many of the works to be performed, including performers:

The second recital in the Adult Education Board's fifth Everyman's music series in Winthrop Hall at 8:15pm tomorrow will consist of chamber music (strings) and soprano. The programme will open with the first movement of the Beethoven Quartet in F major... This will be followed by Four Songs for Voice and Violin (Gustav Holst) presented by Lorna McKean (soprano) and Vaughan Hanly (violinist)...³⁶

The review of this performance contained some interesting contextual points about musical performance at this time:

The opportunity of hearing a programme of chamber music, which, owing to the war, has not been offered for a number of years, was enjoyed by a large audience. The quartette [sic], the male members of which had become used to each other on the platform in khaki, proved themselves an admirable combination, whose work suggested that they had been together for a much longer period than could have

³⁵ "Music and Theatre," *The West Australian*, February 16, 1946, 6.

³⁶ "Everyman's Music," *The West Australian*, April 3, 1946, 3.

been possible in view of their army service. On this occasion they were able to don their conventional attire...

Lorna McKean, with Vaughan Hanly, sang four songs with devotional mediaeval [sic] texts written by Gustav Holst for voice and violin, and, to effective accompaniments arranged for string quartette, four of Mozart's songs... In all the high degree of artistry and charming quality for which she is so well known, were present.³⁷

This is an extremely important review, not so much for its musical criticism, but for the very key point it raises about concerts for the period. It does something almost no other review of the period does - offer an explanation about the lack of contemporary music performances during wartime in Australia. There is almost a performance 'black hole' across all of Holst's music during the Second World War in Australia, where resources and opportunities were much more difficult to come by, and contemporary British music was not high on the priority list for Australian performances.

The last performance of Holst's Four Songs for Voice and Violin that occurred in Australia was found just beyond 1950, given on March 18, 1952 in the Perth suburb of Cottesloe. The review appeared the following day:

An interest more than purely musical attached to last night's programme of chamber music at the Cottesloe Civic Centre.

Leading city artists – the A.B.C.'s string quartet and the soprano Lorna McKean – were bringing this form of art to the suburb for almost the first time in the way of a

³⁷ "Everyman's Music – String Quartet and Singer," *The West Australian*, April 5, 1946, 14.

public performance.... An audience of 150 does not sound impressive, perhaps, but in all the circumstances the W.A. Chamber Music Society (the arrangers of the recital) should feel encouraged to persevere.

It was a very enthusiastic audience, and rightly so: for the performances of quartets by Haydn and Dohnanyi were excellent, particularly in the case of the richly, fervently romantic work of Dohnanyi.

Mr. Vaughan Hanly, the quartet's leader, gave in advance a helpful commentary on both works.

Miss McKean sang beautifully the five songs [sic] of Gustav Holst for solo voice and violin and, with quartet accompaniment, a delightful group of Elizabethan songs.³⁸

Here is another instance of the “five songs” instead of four. The overall tone of the review was extremely positive and use of descriptors such as “richly,” “fervently romantic,” “beautifully,” and “delightfully” highlight the extent of the encouragement for future performances reflected in the review.

Conclusion

The comparison between the British and Australian performance reception of Holst's Four Songs is interesting in that many more performances of the work were found in

³⁸ “Cottesloe Recital of Music,” *The West Australian*, March 19, 1952, 7.

Australia.³⁹ The British run of five performances between 1921 and 1928 is the opposite of its story in Australia. After the premiere by Lilian Stott and Isabel Langlands four-years elapsed before another performance was given, however, once they resumed there were relatively consistent performances given throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

It is noticeable immediately from figure 6.1 that 11 of the 15 performances of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin were given between two states – New South Wales and Western Australia. This geographic concentration has been seen consistently amongst the performance history for works in the previous chapters. Common also is the concentration of performers giving the work – the picture of the champion emerges once again in the form of those like Vaughan Hanly, Lorna McKean, and Zoe Lenegan.⁴⁰

The lion's share of the performances of the Four Songs were given by Lorna McKean and Vaughan Hanley, once in Sydney (just Hanley with another singer) and four performances in Perth. This is another case of Holst's work being championed by particular performers. Once again, the origin of these champions can be traced back to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Lorna McKean was a young singer born in Sydney in 1914, and Vaughan Hanley was 3 years her junior. Both attended the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and settled in Perth after marrying in 1938. The couple completed a tour for the A.B.C prior to the move from Sydney to Perth, where Hanley was promptly appointed as leader of the local A.B.C Orchestra in 1939. The four performances McKean and Hanley gave in Perth were between 1941 and 1952. The Four Songs were obviously a part of their performance repertoire, most likely introduced to

³⁹ It must still be assumed that there were more performances given in both Britain and Australia than uncovered in this thesis. The Four Songs being a work requiring one violinist and one voice was highly likely to have appeared in amateur recitals and concerts that were not reviewed in the major news sources of the day.

⁴⁰ Given the smaller scale of the Four Songs for Voice and Violin, there may have been more performances given that were never reviewed in recitals or more amateur performances. This is purely speculation, however, as the performances listed already account for more Holst's performances than many other of his works in Australia.

McKean by Hanley, who had performed them under the auspices of the British Music Society in Sydney back in October 1936. McKean though was renowned for her performances of new repertoire in Perth by composers such as Hindemith, Debussy and another of Holst's champions, Edgar Bainton. That she would introduce and keep Holst in her repertoire was no surprise.⁴¹

Another noticeable Perth champion of the work was Zoe Lenegan, who was responsible for three performances – 1933, 1936, and 1939. Unlike the McKean/Hanley combination, Lenegan performed with a different violinist each time - an indication that the Four Songs were in her repertoire alone and the violinists accompanying were probably coming to the Holst fresh. Even the performances by Doreen Morgan and Lilian Stott suggests Holst's champions, with the likely scenario that they picked up the work from the singing school set up by Dame Nellie Melba, an ardent supporter of British music under the Head of school and lifelong friend of Holst, Fritz Hart. Both Hart and Melba were present at the British Music Society's inaugural meeting for its Victorian branch where the songs were premiered, thanks to Louise Hanson-Dyer. There was always seemingly a connection.

Louise Hanson-Dyer's championing of Holst's music was critical on several fronts. She organized the first performance in Australia through the British Music Society at her home in 1921, close to when the work was first published in Britain. On broader examination, Hanson-Dyer was a great champion and personal supporter of Holst and his music not only in Australia, but also Britain and Paris. Her philanthropic work in the 1920s with the British Music Society of Victoria Library Collection and Melbourne University Conservatorium Library, as well as the Victorian State Library would place Holst's music within the grasp of The British Music

⁴¹ Brian Pope, "McKean, Lorna Crawford," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mckean-lorna-crawford-10982/text19523> (accessed March 3, 2014).

Society's members, students in Melbourne conservatoriums and even the general public.

Firstly, Hanson-Dyer established and serviced the British Music Society (the Victorian branch) library collection that would from the 1920s provide its membership with access to both early British music and some French music, through to recently published works by the likes of Holst and Vaughan Williams.⁴² In 1926 Hanson-Dyer gifted the Melbourne University Conservatorium library four hundred copies of the *Choral Symphony* op. 41.⁴³ From 1929 Hanson-Dyer redoubled her efforts, with a collection of Holst's published music being obtained,⁴⁴ and the following two years saw another seventy-six of Holst's scores donated to the Public Library of Victoria (now known as the State Library of Victoria) with a stipulation that they were to be made accessible to the public. In a detailed article dealing with Holst and Hanson-Dyer, which is built on the information contained within the British Music Society of Victoria's records as well as Jim Davidson's thorough account of Hanson-Dyer in *Lyrebird Rising*,⁴⁵ scholar Daniela Kaleva surmised that:

The establishment of these libraries not only made performance and research scores available to Melbourne musicians, but the purchasing of scores for the collection also generated royalty income for the composer.⁴⁶

Hanson-Dyer, then, did as much for Holst's music in Australia than the performers and conductors that would perform the music. She not only contributed to Holst's publishing

⁴² This collection contains some of the first printed score from Holst's chamber works, as well as other part-songs and the vocal scores of the operas. It was noted in 1928 that the collection then included various vocal works, three complete orchestral scores, and fifty copies of part-songs. In 1999 Rose Mansley Greer, "Annual Report," (Melbourne: British Music Society Victorian Branch, 1928), Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne.

⁴³ Peter Tregear, "Never a Place out of Notes," *Keeping Scores: 100 Years of the Music Library*, ed. Stephanie Jaehrling (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Library, 2008), 11.

⁴⁴ It would turn out that roughly one-third of the published music in the catalogue that Hanson-Dyer and Holst had put together of the composer's music - Louise Hanson-Dyer, *Gustav Holst in Music by British Composers: A Series of Complete Catalogues* (London, Melbourne: OUP, 1931) - made it in to Australia, with customs duties issues listed as the reason.

⁴⁵ Jim Davidson, *Lyrebird Rising - Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre 1884 - 1962* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

⁴⁶ Daniela Kaleva, "Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer's Patronage of Gustav Holst," *Context: Journal of Music Research*, no. 37 (2012): 77-91.

royalties (indirectly helping the composer financially), but introduced a work to Melbourne and its musical elite that went on to receive many performances in the country. The establishment and support of the various library collections in the state was the single biggest contribution to making Holst's scores accessible in the country for the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Kaleva's article also discussed Hanson-Dyer's support of Holst outside of Australia in detail. She must be counted among the best supporters Holst had during his lifetime, alongside Vaughan Williams, albeit for different reasons than Holst's contemporary.

Chapter 7 – *St. Paul's Suite*

Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* - on the manuscript titled merely 'Suite in C' - was composed in 1913 for the students at the St. Paul's school, where Holst was director of the music programme from 1905 until his death in 1934. The suite comprises four movements: "Jig," "Ostinato," "Intermezzo," and "Finale." His daughter Imogen labelled it "one of his happiest works," and at first hearing it is immediately obvious as to why with its bouncing, dance-inspired melodies.¹ It is also amongst Holst's most 'British' works, with quotes from the English folk-tunes "Dargason" and "Greensleeves" in the Finale (with the 16th century dance tune reference in the title "Dargason," and the obvious influence of 'capers' in Morris dance tunes present in the "Jig").² This was still original Holst, however.³ The "Intermezzo" is one of the most recognizable pieces in Holst's compositional output. Stephen Johnson reflects on Holst's originality, particularly in the "Intermezzo":

But it is the *sound* of that suite that is so shocking. On the one hand, familiar, almost predictable string writing, and suddenly something altogether unfamiliar. Thirty years before Benjamin Britten wrote like *that*. Where on Earth does that sound come from?⁴

The Suite was published by Chester in London (1922), and would prove from the perspective of the public audience to be one of Holst's most popular works. This

¹ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 38.

² Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 38.

³ It is the case that three-quarters of the work was rather more 'originally Holst' than the Finale, which was written three years prior to the rest of the suite. Imogen Holst commented that while it fits the rest of the work well one could tell "that a good deal had happened to him during those three years." She analyzed that The Finale is "almost identical with the Fantasia on the Dargason at the end of the *Second Suite* for Military Band." Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 39.

⁴ Interview given in Tony Palmer, *Holst – In the Bleak Midwinter* (DVD, Tony Palmer, 2011).

popularity could be attributed to a more successful blending of Holst's idiomatic language with the very approachable "familiar, almost predictable string writing" that sounded particularly "British" with its use of folk-elements, rather than some of his more unfamiliar and less approachable Indian and Gnostic-inspired works.

St. Paul's Suite in Britain

Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* was exceptionally well received as evidenced by its British performance history. While they did occur from time to time, there were many fewer instances of incomplete performances of the Suite than full performances. A clear picture emerged from the press notices that the final movement, "Dargason," was the standout crowd favourite, with its incorporation of two English tunes interweaving to great effect. Critics throughout the 1920s and 1930s consistently highlighted their joy (and that of the audiences) resulting from this particular effect, repeatedly crediting Holst's originality and invention.⁵ This interweaving is demonstrated in the example below, occurring in bar 56 of the Finale.

⁵ Nearly every British review for *St. Paul's Suite* discussed in Chapter 2 singled out this interweaving of melodies, beginning with the cello statement (marked "Greensleeves" in bar 56 of the finale "Dargason.")



Figure 7.1 – The interweaving of “Dargason” and “Greensleeves.”

Huismann’s comprehensive research guide to Holst unusually only lists one review for *St. Paul’s Suite*.⁶ However during the course of research for this thesis at least ten performances with reviews were discovered and more performances were certain to have occurred but in circumstances where they were unlikely to be reviewed, including performances at St. Paul’s School for Girls for whose orchestra the work was originally written. The majority of the ten performances discovered were found in the 1920s.⁷ They occurred at regular intervals, and the work was consistently praised for its joyous “English” qualities, with critics noting how it deserved its obvious popularity with the public.⁸ It is relevant to note that this period in the 1920s saw Holst at the height of his popularity, with the success of *The Planets* always at the forefront.

⁶ Mary Christison Huismann, *Gustav Holst - a Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 190.

⁷ See the section on *St. Paul’s Suite* in Chapter 2 for the rundown of the British Reception with these reviews.

⁸ While the Suite itself warrants the popularity, it should also be noted that in the mid-1920s, quite like *Savitri* on the opera scene, the British were desperately keen for a nationalistic voice, and much music with folk elements that could be held up as good ‘British’ music was highlighted as such. *Savitri* was a somewhat special case, too, as it happened to be in the realm of opera, which had not seen many English successes since Henry Purcell hundreds of years prior.

Date	Year	State	City	Group	Performer/Conductor
June 18	1927	NSW	Sydney	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	W. Arundel Orchard
May 30	1928	W/A	Perth	Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra	Harry Vowles
May 16	1933	W/A	Perth	Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra	Harry Vowles
August 15	1934	W/A	Perth	Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra	Edward Black
August 30	1934	NSW	Sydney	ABC Orchestra	Fritz Hart
November 20	1934	W/A	Perth	Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra	A. J. Leckie
August 17	1938	NSW	Sydney	Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra	Edgar Bainton
August 11	1939	VIC	Melbourne	ABC Orchestra	Joseph Post
September 26	1941	SA	Adelaide	ABC Orchestra	Ernest J. Roberts
September 19	1945	VIC	Melbourne	University Conservatorium Students Club	Henri Touzeau
September 26	1945	NSW	Sydney	Boyd Neel String Orchestra	Boyd Neel
May 17	1947	VIC	Melbourne	Boyd Neel String Orchestra	Boyd Neel
February 5	1949	TAS	Hobart	Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra	Murison Bourn
February 9	1949	TAS	Hobart?	Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra	Murison Bourn
September 22	1951	VIC	Melbourne	Asta Flack String Orchestra	Asta Flack

Figure 7.2 – Australian Performances of *St. Paul's Suite*.

St. Paul's Suite in Australia

The first performance to be uncovered of *St. Paul's Suite* in Australia was given on Saturday the June 18, 1927 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, some five years after its initial British premiere. The review would highlight the rousing welcome the Suite had in the country:

Saturday afternoon's orchestral concert at the Conservatorium was chiefly notable for Gustav Holst's suite for strings, "St. Paul's," and the "Sigurd Jorsalfar" suite by Grieg. There was a very large audience.

"St. Paul's" gains its name from the music school in London of which Mr. Holst is principal, and for whose orchestra he composed the work. It is in four movements, all of them filled with an eager imagination and an endless variety of colour. Under Mr. W. Arundel Orchard's baton the players did full justice to them, and were greeted with rousing applause – so much so that the third section, the intermezzo, had to be repeated, making the only encore that was granted during the afternoon. This movement began with a tender theme for the first violins against the 'cellos pizzicato, passing thence to a very beautiful solo violin passage, well interpreted by Mr. Cyril Monk: in upon this passage the rest of the violins burst in unison and then died away, so that a rich melody for a single viola was thrown into relief. Recurrent subjects in a bright jig measure lent diversity to the scheme, without incongruously breaking it up. In the Finale the chief point of interest is the skill with which the composer has

interwoven a boisterous dance tune with the quieter Elizabethan folk melody, “Greensleeves,” in the first section also (“Jig”) and in the second (“Ostinato”) folk melodies have been used with delightful effect.⁹

This must have been a rather rowdy audience, as later in the review there is the reflection that “the audience would gladly have encored “The Blue Danube,” but Mr. Orchard quelled the applause by protesting that the work was far too long to be given again.” The critic noting that the Holst and Grieg were the most interesting things on the programme is telling, and the amount of detail given to describe the Holst Suite is secondary to the tone and language describing just how well received it was by the large audience in attendance. They “greeted [St. Paul’s Suite] with rousing applause – so much so that the third section, the intermezzo, had to be repeated, making the only encore that was granted during the afternoon.” The performance under Orchard was clearly masterful, and the work itself described as being “filled with an eager imagination and an endless variety of colour.” If this was the Australian premiere, a Holst work had not been so enthusiastically received since the Sydney Conservatorium Orchestra performed *The Planets* under Orchard two years prior.¹⁰ The Australian critic also followed what many of the British critics highlighted when noting the interweaving of the two recognized tunes in the finale being the standout moment.

Several months later the *St. Paul’s Suite* was noted in the Australian press as an orchestral test piece in a competition in Britain, as mentioned by a correspondent in

⁹ “Conservatorium – Orchestral Matinee,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 20, 1927, 10.

¹⁰ It was not noted specifically as the Australian premiere in the review, but the discussion points and detail given to the work would lend weight to the theory it was at least the Sydney premier of the work. Given its track record with other Holst performances and premieres, and that there were no other records of the *St. Paul’s Suite* found prior, the likelihood of this being the premiere is high.

London. That this was reportable news indicated the prominence and popularity of the work, and Holst's growing reputation on the international scene following the success of *The Planets*.¹¹

The next performance of the suite was in Western Australia, and became the first of four performances of the Holst work to be given over a six-year period by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. There was another discussion about where the suite had received its name – the critic noting it was not of biblical significance, but instead named for the school where Holst taught– and a brief description that even though the orchestra was not at its best, in the Holst “they were capitally effective.”¹² That was all the critic mentioned of the work, but followed it up with general commentary on Holst as a composer:

All the music by this modern Englishman that one hears strengthens the conviction that his is a thoroughly distinctive voice in the music of today, speaking clearly and unhesitatingly.

Such sentiments were becoming a common attribute of reviews of Holst's works in the later 1920s, especially in his native England. In the post-*Planets* world, all of Holst's music was perceived to have become more approachable than was previously the case.

The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra's next performance of the work was given on May 16, 1933. It outlined a programme including Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*,

¹¹ “Music in England – Broadcasting the Promenades,” *The Argus*, October 1, 1927, 8.

¹² “Music,” *Western Mail*, May 31, 1928, 12.

Handel's *Water Music* arranged by Sir Hamilton Harty, the overture to Rossini's *Barber of Seville* and Holst's *St. Paul's Suite*. How a work could be 'imported' by a touring musician was discussed in the short notice:

The orchestra will be directed by Mr. H. Vowles... the honorary conductor, whose first appearance as conductor of the orchestra it will be since his return from England and the Continent. Amongst the works Mr. Vowles heard abroad was the Schubert Symphony, which will be played on May 16.¹³

Vowles had attended a performance of the Schubert on his trip, and immediately on his return had organized a performance. There were three more concert previews in *The West Australian* in the week preceding the Perth performance of *St. Paul's Suite*. Found on May 12, 13, and 16, 1933, they are a condensed version of the May 6 preview.¹⁴ The idea of the travelling conductor discovering and taking music from place to place was again noted in the similar May 12 preview. The review of the concert was quite complimentary of the whole program, and focused on the positive effect the return of Vowles had had on the quality of the orchestra compared to the several years prior. On *St. Paul's Suite*, the critic commented:

In Holst's cunningly-made "St. Paul's" suite, for strings, the playing was notably good also... in the Holst the vigorous Jig was well pointed and tellingly incisive, and the Intermezzo — a strongly individual number with sudden contrasts and haunting lyrical moments— was also presented very

¹³ "Music and the Theatre," *The West Australian*, May 6, 1933, 5.

¹⁴ "Entertainments – Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra," *The West Australian*, May 12, 1933, 8.

"Music and the Theatre," *The West Australian*, May 13, 1933, 5.

"Entertainments – Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra," *The West Australian*, May 16, 1933, 12.

successfully... The concert, which was largely attended, took place at the Town Hall.¹⁵

Given the nature of the concert, with the Holst suite being a small work relative to the rest of the programme, as well as having taken place in Perth (somewhat remote in the contemporary music sense), it is most likely down to Vowles that *St. Paul's* was produced. Having just returned from Britain, it is probable that Vowles had heard to the work there, and brought it with him, as he had done with the Schubert Symphony. The work being described as “cunningly-made” echoes many critics’ description of Holst the composer, both in Australia and Britain. That the critic represented the Holst having been “presented very successfully” to a large audience hints at a very receptive welcome to this contemporary work by the Western Australian audience.

St. Paul's Suite was given the following year in Perth, in August 1934. The first preview note appeared in *The West Australian* early in the month, and noted a new conductor for the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra after Vowles (who had been responsible for the last two performances of the Suite) had departed:

The concert to be given on Wednesday, August 15th, in the Town Hall by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra will be the first under the conductorship of Mr. Edward Black. Mr. Black was appointed honorary conductor of the orchestra on the departure of Mr. H. Vowles for England. Incidentally, this will be the orchestra's 70th concert. The programme includes Mozart's

¹⁵ “An Excellent Concert,” *The West Australian*, May 17, 1933, 10.

“Indomeneus” [sic] overture, Haydn’s Symphony in D (the London), Elgar’s “Imperial March,” a “Nursery Suite” by Adam Carse and some numbers from Gustav Holst’s “St. Paul’s Suite...” This concert will not be broadcast.¹⁶

It is interesting to see that around the cornerstones of Mozart and Haydn, this programme was built entirely by English composers. That Vowles was English, and had recently returned there, and that the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra was performing these English composers, then it is no stretch to imagine that Vowles was largely responsible for this English music being performed in Western Australia. A similar preview is seen during the following week, once more drawing attention to the milestone of the orchestra’s seventieth performance, and the first performance with Edward Black in charge.¹⁷ It mentioned that “two numbers from Gustav Holst’s *St. Paul’s Suite*” will be performed, but no mention was made to which ones they may be. A few days later, yet another preview appeared, again quite similar to the previous preview advertisements:

At the concert to be presented by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra in the town Hall at 8 o’clock on Wednesday evening next, the principal item will be Haydn’s “London” Symphony. This will be supported by Mozart’s “Indomeneus” [sic] overture, Elgar’s Imperial March, a “Nursery Suite” by Adam Carse and some numbers from the “St. Paul” [sic] suite for strings by Gustav Holst.¹⁸

¹⁶ “Music and Theatre,” *The West Australian*, August 4, 1934, 7.

Adam Carse (1878– 1958) was an English musician and scholar.

¹⁷ “Entertainments – Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra,” *The West Australian*, August 9, 1934, 10.

¹⁸ “Music and Theatre,” *The West Australian*, August 11, 1934, 7.

The language used to describe the English portion of the concert is interesting to note. The cornerstone – the ‘principal item’ is the *London* Symphony of Haydn. The English music of Elgar, Holst and Carse are billed as ‘supporting’ by the author of the review, lending less emphasis to their importance or worth. The effect of top-billing and good media support in the lead up to a performance had already resulted in successful performances for Holst in the case of *Savitri* and *The Planets*. An audience reading this preview would most likely have approached the work with a reduced level of interest, with Holst merely added to the end of a list of British composers after a highlighted Haydn symphony.

The final preview for the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra concert appeared on the day of the performance. Besides the list of pieces, information on the size of the orchestra was given.¹⁹ The performance review appeared in the paper the following morning, beginning with a short history of the Haydn symphony and continuing with comment on the performance:

Perhaps the highest artistic satisfaction of the concert was to be gained from two numbers of the “St. Pauls” suite for strings, by the late Gustav Holt [sic]. Firstly, there was a tonal satisfaction to be had from the body of strings which, truth to tell, the full orchestra conveyed less consistently. Secondly, the two items, Intermezzo and Jig, are music of a character the distinctiveness of which showed up markedly in their environment of last night. Both, one feels – the racy, rough Jig, vigorous with a tang of the countryside, and the

¹⁹ “Entertainments – The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra,” *The West Australian*, August 15, 1934, 8.

beautiful solo violin's song, tenderly ruminative, in the Intermezzo – are wholly English.

Adam Carse's "Nursery Suite," music of a lighter order, made pleasant hearing, and the audience (which was not particularly large) obtained a repetition of the finale....²⁰

Whilst there was "nothing spectacular" about the concert, the Holst suite was highlighted as the "highest artistic satisfaction." The critic described the Intermezzo and Jig as "wholly English" – which in this context was extremely positive. The Carse work being performed showed that the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra was clearly giving the contemporary British music scene fair representation. The sentiment of memorial concerts and performances shortly after a composer had died would almost guarantee a flattering reception. While this concert took place mere months after Holst's death, the review and tone do not suggest any form of sentiment related to his passing, and as such the work was standing entirely on its own musical merit. It was noted the audience at the Town Hall was not overly large, but no mention was made as to how they received the work; however there was no doubt about the positivity shown by the critic.

Later in August 1934, on the opposite side of the continent in Sydney, Fritz Hart conducted the ABC Orchestra in a concert at the Conservatorium Hall. A preview outlining the concerts to be held in the upcoming "music week" appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The article announced that:

²⁰ "Haydn and Some Moderns," *The West Australian*, August 16, 1934, 13.

Next Thursday night the Broadcasting Commission's orchestra and the Musical Association Choir will present some music by Fritz Hart which promises to be interesting. It is headed by a first performance of "Joll's Credo," a choral work which won the first prize in its particular section in the Australian composers' competition which the Broadcasting Commission organized in 1932.²¹

This article outlines a performance that should draw some interest from the local Sydney crowd – the Director of the Albert Street Conservatorium in Melbourne conducting a concert that included a prize-winning contemporary composition. This interest was boosted in the preview article on the day of the concert:

The principal Music Week event to-day [sic] will be a concert in the evening at the Conservatorium Hall. The second part of the programme is a memorial to Gustav Holst and Sir Edward Elgar. Of Holst, it includes the "Country Song" and "Marching Song;" and of Elgar, a "Wand of Youth" Suite and some smaller works. Mr. Fritz Hart will conduct the Broadcasting Commission's Orchestra in a series of his own compositions.²²

Interestingly, this preview did not mention the performance of *St. Paul's Suite* or that the songs mentioned would be sung by the Musical Association choir, which was to be directed by Lindley Evans not Fritz Hart. The next day, the 'review' appeared in the paper.²³ It made no mention of the reception of the works and no comment on the audience. There was a secondary article that briefly commented on the previous night's concert, saying "Last night, the orchestral concert conducted by Mr. Fritz Hart at the Conservatorium drew a large house. The orchestra was that of the

²¹ "Music Week," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 25, 1934, 10.

²² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 30, 1934, 6.

²³ "Works by Fritz Hart," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 31, 1934, 15.

Broadcasting Commission.”²⁴ So with the evidence at hand, this concert, which involved Holst’s *St. Paul’s Suite* and two choral works, drew a large crowd and much interest. This would most likely have been due to Hart’s involvement – a musical titan from interstate – and his prize-winning composition. Also the fact that it was “music week” – a concentration of concerts and events, could explain the large attendance. There is no doubt either that, unlike the concerts in Western Australia, this *was* a ‘memorial’ inclusion of Holst’s music

Again in November of 1934 in Western Australia, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra performed a movement from Holst’s *St. Paul’s Suite* as part of its final concert for the year. A preview stated:

The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra will give its last concert for the season on November 20, at the Anzac House Hall. With Mr. A. J. Leckie as guest conductor, the orchestra will play the overture, “Son and Stranger” (Mendelssohn), “Suite from the Water Music,” by Handel... The first, third and fourth movements of Mozart’s “Symphony in G Minor,” suite “L’Arlesienne” (Bizet), the last movement of the “St. Paul” [sic] suite for strings (Holst) and the overture “Mirella” by Gounod will also be played...²⁵

This was certainly a scattering of works making up a programme rather than a centrepiece surrounded by relevant satellites. A more detailed picture of the upcoming performance was given in the next preview:

²⁴ “Music Week,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 31, 1934, 15.

²⁵ “Entertainments – Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra,” *The West Australian*, November 13, 1934, 12.

On Tuesday Evening next, in the new Anzac Hall, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra will present its last concert of the present season. The guest conductor will be Mr. A. J. Leckie, who founded the orchestra in 1913 and conducted it till 1923. It is interesting to note that, of the original orchestra, five members will be playing at this, the 71st concert. A programme of more than ordinary interest is promised... A novel feature, which should enhance the enjoyment of listeners, will be that, instead of the customary programme annotations, Mr. Leckie will give a short talk about each of the numbers before it is played.²⁶

The last preview note appeared on the day of the performance, and repeated much of the content from the article on November 17.²⁷ The review primarily discussed the Mozart symphony presented, and ‘some moderns’:

The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra held its final concert of the season, last night, in the new hall of Anzac House – a great improvement in every way on its former home, the Town Hall. Mr. A. J. Leckie, Mus.Bac., who founded the orchestra in 1913 and conducted it for 10 years, was guest conductor for the occasion, directing a well-balanced and attractive programme which included a masterpiece of the classic symphony literature – or, to be strictly accurate, three-fourths of one. The first, third and fourth movements of Mozart’s G minor symphony were performed...

Capital, too, was the performance by the strings of Gustav Holst’s “St. Paul’s” suite, with the old English dance-tunes of “Dargason” and “Greensleeves”

²⁶ “Music and Theatre,” *The West Australian*, November 17, 1934, 23.

²⁷ “Entertainments – Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra,” *The West Australian*, November 20, 1934, 16.

making a joyous marriage. Mr. Leckie obtained a thoroughly vital, well-pointed performance, which the audience appreciated so much that the piece was repeated. The concert ended with Gounod's pretty "Mirella" overture...

An innovation was the substitution for the usual printed programme-notes of brief commentaries by the conductor before each item. This had the decided advantage of enabling about four times as much pertinent information to be given to the listeners, in a brief minute or two of talking, as by the other mode.

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It is clear from this review that the finale of *St. Paul's Suite* was very well received. The demand for its repetition speaks volumes. Perhaps the introductory discussion from the conductor about the work conferred a specific advantage to the Holst work; however there was no mention of other works being nearly as well received. Once again the critic was impressed by the combination of two English tunes in Holst's "Dargason," a very common feature in both the Australian and British press.

Four years later, *St. Paul's Suite* was performed again in Sydney under Edgar Bainton at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. The performance, which took place on the August 17 1938, was advertised in the previous Saturday's *Sydney Morning Herald*:

At next Wednesday's concert by the Conservatorium Orchestra, Dr. Edgar Bainton will conduct the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius. This Symphony was announced once before, during the Georg Schneevoigt's season. But at that time, the public had had an over-supply of Sibelius, in proportion to the total of

²⁸ "Mozart and Some Moderns," *The West Australian*, November 21, 1934, 12.

orchestral music, and the Broadcasting Commission allowed Schneevoigt to conduct a symphony by another composer....The programme includes also Beethoven's B Flat Piano Concerto (Miss Daphne Harpur, soloist), the overture to "Die Meistersinger," and the "St. Paul's" Suite by Gustav Holst.²⁹

The Sibelius Symphony being removed from a previous season's programme due to "over-supply" of one composer's repertoire is unusual. This must have been a very rare occurrence, as it was not a problem that contemporary composers seemed to have been faced with at all. The concert review mentions very little in relation to the performance of Holst, but there were some interesting points raised:

The main events in last night's programme by the Conservatorium Orchestra were in the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius and Beethoven's B Flat Piano Concerto.

The Sibelius had not previously been heard in Sydney. As conducted by Dr. Bainton, it proved to be a work of singular power. Also, it was remarkably stark and austere. Even in the second and forth movements where the themes took on vigorous exultant contours, the general atmosphere remained brooding, as though the composer were remembering past gaiety in the midst of a melancholy present... As a prelude to the symphony, Dr. Bainton conducted Holst's "St. Paul's" Suite for strings.³⁰

It is interesting that the Sibelius symphony had been changed in Schneevoigt's conducting season, as it was to have been the premiere for the work in Australia. The critic made no mention of the audience's reaction to either work. The following year, Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* was performed as part of an all-British programme in

²⁹ "Symphony by Sibelius," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 13, 1938, 20.

³⁰ "Fourth Symphony of Sibelius," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 18, 1938, 12.

Victoria. While no previews or advertisements were found for the concert, the review in *The Argus* provides an interesting reflection on British music and its programming:

Excellent organisation was displayed at the Town Hall yesterday, when, under the auspices of the City Council, the A.B.C (Melbourne) Symphony Orchestra presented the opening programme of the second midday concert series.

The Performance began and ended punctually and consideration was shown towards the latecomers and “early leavers,” who create an unavoidable but difficult problem at midday recitals... At both the pre-lunch hour session yesterday, and during the 1-1:30 performance, there were many rows of empty seats.

An all-British programme had intrinsic interest, and brought into play the most vital and attractive qualities of Mr. Joseph Post’s conducting technique.

The death of Gustav Holst, as the result of an accident while conducting and the loss of Gerald [sic] Butterworth – killed in action in 1916 – removed from musical England a mature genius and a talent of rare promise. Holst’s “St. Paul’s Suite” and Butterworth’s “Shropshire Lad” rhapsody were admirably handled by the A.B.C players. Another successfully played item was Hamilton Harty’s “In the Antrum Hills,” which revealed the charming warmth of temperament that endeared the Irish composer-conductor to Australian musicians and Australian audiences in 1934.

It may be suggested that, in the future all-British programmes should include one Australian composition.³¹

This critic described Holst as a “mature genius” – whilst it was in the context of discussion about the composer’s death, the strength of such a description certainly stands out. The review also mentioned that Holst was well represented by Joseph Post, who was certainly no stranger to Holst’s music, or to British music in general. He had performed on oboe in the premiere performance of *The Planets* in Sydney, and later conducted several movements of it with this orchestra in Melbourne.³² The end of this review seems to be an early indication of a yearning for an independent national musical identity by this critic – as Australia was so ‘British’ in its musical identity in the first half of the twentieth century (arguably even later) with many music schools headed and staffed by the British, and many young Australian musicians heading to England to further their studies and careers. Specifically, Australian musicians that would end up in prominent positions, such as Bernard Heinze (1894-1982) who studied at the Royal College of Music from 1911 and upon his return joined the staff of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 1925. Later he was the Director of the New South Wales Conservatorium of music (1957-1966).³³ Another example was the conductor A.J. Leckie (1881-1966), who was born in Victoria and made the journey to study at the Royal College of Music in 1904-1907. He then returned to live and work in Perth, where he would champion British music, including many Holst choral and vocal performances.³⁴ Prominent British-born musicians who occupied the leading roles in Australian music included Fritz

³¹ “Municipal Concert - British Programme,” *The Argus*, August 12, 1939, 2.

³² Previously discussed in Chapter 3.

³³ Thérèse Radic, “Heinze, Sir Bernard,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12713> (accessed October 12, 2014).

³⁴ Brian Pope, “Leckie, Alexander Joseph,” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/leckie-alexander-joseph-7140/text12323> (accessed October 13, 2014).

Hart (1874-1949), who would run the Albert Street Conservatorium,³⁵ Arundel Orchard (1867-1961) who helped found the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music and succeeded Verbruggen as its Director from 1923-1934,³⁶ and Edgar Bainton (1880-1956) who would take over that role from Bainton from 1934-1947.³⁷ These are all names that feature heavily throughout this examination of Holst's music in Australia. With such entanglement between the British musical establishment and Australia, the only possible outcome was the Australia's adaptation of the British musical identity.

Several years later, a performance in Adelaide on September 26, 1941, was reviewed in South Australia's *The Mail*:

Several orchestral works which had not been previously performed in Adelaide were given in the town hall tonight [last night], when Ernest J. Roberts, Perth conductor, directed the last orchestral concert of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's subscription season.

In addition to these new works, the singing of Harold Williams proved a magnet for many, for this fine Australian-born baritone had not appeared here this season.

³⁵ Anne-Marie Forbes, "Hart, Fritz," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12463> (accessed October 12, 2014).

³⁶ John Carmody, "Orchard, Arundel," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43444> (accessed October 12, 2014).

³⁷ "Bainton, Edgar," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e754> (accessed October 12, 2014).

Outstanding in the evening's work were the "Irish Symphony," based on folk tunes by Sir Hamilton Harty, and Harold Williams' singing of the dramatic "Mephistopheles' Serenade" from "Faust."

The delightful string work in Gustav Holst's "St. Paul's" suite was a credit to the players, and some fine dramatic work was given in "The Accursed Hunter" (Franck), a composition new to Adelaide audiences... Mr. Roberts made a success of his first appearance here as conductor of a full symphony orchestra, giving evidence of good and flexible control and a full understanding of music, which, on the whole, demanded dramatic rather than aesthetic values.³⁸

The tone of this review is very positive, and while limited coverage is given to the Holst, it is described as a "delightful string work" and a credit to the ensemble, presenting a successful performance. The *St. Paul's Suite* was almost certainly new to Adelaide audiences as well (discounting any unreported school or amateur performances), but this fact was not highlighted whereas the other works had been. There was no audience reception of the concert noted; however it may be assumed that it was well attended with the hint of Harold Williams being a "magnet for many."

It is not until after the Second World War that reference to another performance of the *St. Paul's Suite* can be found in Australia. In a social column, a report of a concert by the Melbourne University Conservatorium Students' Club was described:

University Concert

³⁸ "Singer Proves Magnet for Many," *The Mail*, September 27, 1941, 7.

Though it has been used successfully for many big dramatic productions, the University Union Theatre is ideal for intimate concerts such as the chamber music and one-act play entertainment given tonight by the University Conservatorium Students' Club and the University Arts' Association. There was a cosy atmosphere about the place. This joint presentation was part of a movement for greater co-operation between two student bodies.

The programme included the Bach Concerto no 3 in D minor for two violins and orchestra; St. Paul's Suite by Gustav Holst; and a reading of Sasha Guitry's "Villa for Sale." The orchestra was conducted by Henri Touzeau and the play reading directed by Stephen Murray-Smith.³⁹

At this point in time the Melbourne University Conservatorium was being run by Bernard Heinze (whose tenure had begun in 1925 and would continue until 1957),⁴⁰ and it was most likely one of his initiatives to see further cooperation between the two student organizations mentioned.

Several performances of *St. Paul's Suite* were given by the famous Boyd Neel Orchestra, on tour from England.⁴¹ Whilst there was frequent media coverage given to their tour and performances, the first mention of their performing the Holst work

³⁹ "The Life of Melbourne," *The Argus*, September 26, 1945, 10.

⁴⁰ Radic, "Heinze, Sir Bernard," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*.

⁴¹ Boyd Neel was a doctor before he became a professional musician, founding his orchestra which was drawn from elite young musicians. The Boyd Neel Orchestra first performed at the Aeolian Hall in London on the June 22 1933, and championed British works (a performance of Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* -composed for Neel's orchestra – at the Salzburg Festival in 1937 was key in establishing Britten's international reputation as well as that of the orchestra. It must be highlighted that the Boyd Neel Orchestra's debut recording was of Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* for Decca in 1934. They were well established champions of the work in Britain. Diana McVeagh and Ezra Schabas. "Neel, Boyd." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19675> (accessed September 20, 2014).

was found in Brisbane's *The Courier Mail*.⁴² The article referred to a broadcast from Sydney, stating:

Broadcasting through 4QR from the Sydney Conservatorium at 8:15 to-night the Boyd Neel String Orchestra will play Bach's Brandenburg Concerto, No. 3, "Serenata Nocturna" (Mozart), "Charconne" [sic] (Purcell), and "St. Paul's Suite" (Gustav Holst).

No review of this performance was found,⁴³ but given the tone of discussion in the media surrounding the Orchestra's tour, it would be more interesting if any review mentioned a negative aspect of the works or the performance.

The Boyd Neel Orchestra performed Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* once again in a concert in Melbourne on the May 17, 1947. The review, found in *The Argus* a few days later, heaped praise on the performance:

The concert by Dr Boyd Neel's string orchestra on Saturday afternoon was, possibly, even better than the previous two heard in Melbourne. It opened with an unerring performance of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No 3, in which the tones were always vibrant and rich.

Gustav Holst's "St. Paul's Suite for Strings" was given in the best English taste, with sweeping tempo in the jig and with exquisite inflexions in the Ostinato. The intermezzo began with soft, plucking strings, suddenly interrupted with an electrifying crescendo.

⁴² "Australian Plan On Air To-night," *The Courier Mail*, April 26, 1947, 7.

⁴³ This was possibly a broadcast performance without an audience, which would not have received a review.

The Benjamin Britten “Simple Symphony” was sheer joy. After a well-developed Boisterous Bouree, the Playful Pizzicato contained delightful shadings. Broad tones surrounded the Sentimental Saraband, while the Frolicsome Finale introduced some superbly fast, but balanced bowing...⁴⁴

The language used by the reviewer is quite strongly full of praise for all of the works performed. This opinion of performance excellence is mirrored unanimously in reviews of most of the other concerts given on their tour. The critic was enamoured with the performance of the orchestra, although no mention was made of audience reaction to the concert.

Two performances were given in Tasmania in 1949. A detailed review of the first concert on the February 5 was presented in *The Mercury* newspaper a few days later:⁴⁵

Before an appreciative audience in the Hobart Town Hall on Saturday night, the Tasmanian Orchestra, conducted by Murison Bourn, in association with Sydney baritone, John Cameron, gave an enjoyable programme with a predominantly English flavour.

The orchestra, under the conductor’s vigorous, unambiguous beat, made an auspicious beginning with Elgar’s “Cockaigne Overture,” adequately conveying the cross-sections of London life.... Then followed a gratifying performance of “St. Paul’s Suite” for string orchestra by Gustave [sic] Holst.

⁴⁴ “Boyd Neel Orchestra again Delights,” *The Argus*, May 19, 1947, 15.

⁴⁵ “Orchestra, Singer in Enjoyable Concert,” *The Mercury*, February 7, 1949, 5.

The solo violin passage, hauntingly echoed in parts by the viola, was finely achieved by the orchestral leader, Lionel Hickey. There was beautiful singing tone in the playing of the old English air “Greensleeves,” introduced into the finale...

John Cameron created a most favourable impression in the group of songs by Handel, Coleridge-Taylor, and Alan Murray, all with orchestral accompaniment... He was enthusiastically received and gave the well-known ballad “The Yeoman of England” on recall. The concert ended with the “London Everyday” Suite, by Eric Coates.

The British theme of the Tasmanian concerts under their “London Inspired” billing was represented with a selection of British composers and Haydn’s last “London” Symphony. The Holst was sparsely described, suggesting only that a gratifying performance was produced, and that Lionel Hickey executed the solo violin passage in the Intermezzo well. And of course the “Greensleeves” tune caught the ear once again, as it had with so many critics. The same programme was given at the National Theatre in Launceston on Wednesday February 9, reviewed in the following day’s *Mercury*:

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra was enjoyably at home in the lighter works included in its “London Inspired” programme at the National Theatre last night.

Soloist with the orchestra was John Cameron, whose beautiful baritone voice was heard to advantage in seven well-known English songs, including “Where’er You Walk,” “For England,” “Drake’s Drum,” and “The Yeoman of England,” the last being given in response to warm applause...

Elgar's picturesque "Cockaigne" Overture, with its many variations of mood, was a happy opening to the concert, and the equally happy conclusion was Eric Coates' melodious, nostalgic "London Every Day" Suite which, though very familiar, was fully appreciated because of the orchestra's lively rendition...

Gustav Holst's "St. Paul's Suite" for strings was beautifully played, and contained some exquisite solo violin work by the orchestra leader, Lionel Hickey...

Last night's concert showed evidence of hard work by the orchestra, under the baton of Murison Bourn, and gave every reason for confidence in its successful future.⁴⁶

This review is essentially a re-writing of the one produced for the Hobart concert, with the wording slightly altered. Again no audience reaction to the Holst was conveyed, however both Tasmanian concerts were very positively received by the critic.

Another performance of *St. Paul's Suite* sits just outside of the time period examined and was given in Melbourne on the September 22, 1951, reviewed by Biddy Allen in *The Argus* the following Monday:

RAYMOND LAMBERT was enthusiastically welcomed at the Nicholas Hall on Saturday night.

He appeared as guest soloist with Asta Flack's string orchestra.

This accomplished pianist produced a delightfully sensitive tone in the arioso section of the Bach F Minor Concerto, and showed complete understanding

⁴⁶ "Fine Recital Given by Orchestra," *The Mercury*, February 10, 1949, 3.

of the combined melancholy, lassitude, and exuberance of Liszt's

"Impression" of a Petrarch sonnet.

An able musician with any amount of drive and personality, Madame Flack excited her players to appropriately quick and energetic response in Gustav Holst's "St. Paul's Suite."

Her dynamic style was, however, less convincing when applied to classical items.

To recreate the intimate charm of 18th century "room music" in the bare over-resonant setting of a modern concert hall is no easy matter, but Madame Flack's artistic venture of a "Chamber Orchestral Society" depends for its success upon the strict maintenance of "period" values.⁴⁷

It is interesting to note that Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* was programmed a handful of times with Bach concertos, particularly in Britain (the string ensemble set-up would lend an explanation to the appropriateness of such a pairing, with only the commonly available core violin, viola, cello, bass instrumentation required). The tone reflected a good performance, but did not really note its reception or divulge much detail.

Conclusion

The *St. Paul's Suite* can be held up as shining example of 'popular' Holst – aside from *The Planets*, it was perhaps his most popular and best-received work. Its charm lies in its relative simplicity - after all written for his students at St. Paul's School -

⁴⁷ Biddy Allen, "Graceful Pianist," *The Argus*, September 24, 1951, 2.

combined with wonderful use of traditional folk tunes and stamped with Holst's trademark sound such as the Adagio in the "Intermezzo."

The consistent run of performances in Britain was mirrored, even exceeded, in Australia. There was universal acclaim for the work, and almost unanimous praise for its execution in most instances. The audiences received the Suite enthusiastically, particularly in Britain where it was often noted that repeats of the work or a movement were given due to the demand of the audience. Once again the Australian audiences heard the suite in its entirety, as had the British audiences, however when there was an abridged performance it was the "Dargason" that was the popular choice to programme – which is hardly surprising with the consistent highlighting by critics of the interweaving of the two British tunes used in the movement, still present more than a decade after the initial performances were heard.

This is an example of a Holst work that was not championed by a particular group of performers, however Holst himself conducted the Suite many times in Britain. The Australian performances were evenly spread around various ensembles and locations – quite the opposite of many of the other works where the Sydney Conservatorium of Music was prominent in the production of Holst's music. The smaller requirements of the ensemble called-upon to perform the Suite, and its accessible nature led to the work being picked up and happily performed and received well everywhere it found itself. While some of the usual names, such as Post, Bainton, Orchard, and Hart had the Suite performed, touring orchestras such as the Boyd Neel ensemble brought the work from Britain in their repertoire. Even in Vowles' case, we see an instance of a

conductor most likely bringing the work to an Australian orchestra that would not have otherwise performed it.

Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* was to be the height of Holst's popular writing for a smaller ensemble, with the accessibility of the music and the "English" mood captured. The various orchestral works discussed in the next chapter show the other end of the spectrum - his struggle as a contemporary composer.

Chapter 8 – Other Orchestral Works

Having considered Gustav Holst's larger and more influential works, his remaining orchestral works that received performances in Australia, but were not discussed in their own chapter will be considered here. Unlike the previous chapters, which discussed one specific work organized in chronological order of performances, this chapter will, for simplicity, return to discussion of works grouped by composition and will focus on a discussion on each of the following: "Scene de Nuit" from *Suite de Ballet*; *A Festival Chime*; *Country Song* and *Marching Song*; the *Japanese Suite*; *A Somerset Rhapsody*; and *Seven Scottish Airs*. For the sake of completeness, included too are the media announcements and commentary about some works where no performances eventuated.

An overview of the Australian performance timeline for all of the works discussed is given in the chart below, followed by an examination of each work and its reception in Australia. These works will be discussed individually and listed alphabetically for ease of reference.

Date	Year	State	Piece	Ensemble	Conductor
June 16	1921	VIC	Scene de Nuit from Suite de Ballet	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	Alberto Zelman
November 22	1927	QLD	A Festival Chime	Unspecified	E.R.B. Jordan
October 22	1928	VIC	Country Song and Marching Song	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	Fritz Hart
June 3	1932	VIC	Unspecified Work	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	Fritz Hart
August 20	1932	VIC	Marching Song	Malvern Orchestra	William Mallinson
December 3	1933	VIC	Marching Song	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra	Fritz Hart
August 30	1934	NSW	Country Song and Marching Song	A.B.C. Orchestra	Fritz Hart
December 6	1935	WA	Japanese Suit	West Guilford Orchestral Society	Charles Gamba
April 13	1940	NSW	A Somerset Rhapsody	Sydney Symphony Orchestra	Bernard Heinze
April 7	1941	VIC	Japanese Suite	Melbourne Conservatorium Orchestra	Unspecified
July 17	1944	VIC	Seven Scottish Airs	Melbourne Junior Orchestra	Unspecified
October 3	1952	TAS	A Somerset Rhapsody	Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra	Kenneth Murison Bourn
November 30	1953	NSW	Unknown Work	Sydney Symphony Orchestra	Joseph Post

Figure 8.1 – Australian Performance Timeline of Holst’s miscellaneous orchestral works.

A Festival Chime

A Festival Chime was composed in 1916, and published during the same year in England by Stainer and Bell as part of *Three Festival Choruses, with Orchestra* (the other two were titled “Let all mortal flesh keep silence,” and “Turn back, O Man”). These works were the result of Holst’s involvement in the Thaxted community, and *A Festival Chime* was originally penned under the title “Our Church-bells at Thaxted.” This collection of choral works was written with the amateur musicians at Thaxted in mind, and Imogen Holst elaborated on this aspect:

In *A Festival Chime*... the varied chimes are never too complicated for a small village choir, and the verse for trebles only, with legato thirds over alternating tonic and dominant, is an example of a simplicity that knew how to be gracious. He was incapable of committing the crime of writing down to his amateurs, and in *Turn Back, O Man* he never allows his imagination to be pushed aside by the technical limitations of his singers. This was perhaps one of his most far-reaching contributions to the musical life of England during the difficult first quarter of the century, this reminder that the fundamental necessities of music are shared alike by the original thinker piercing the distances and by the amateur struggling to learn his notes.¹

No critic ever accused Holst of writing down to his amateurs, and it was the performances of his difficult music that often informed a critic’s view of any other work. The music always *seemed* nice, but the performer was struggling to bring out

¹ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 56.

Holst's intentions. No reviews were found for performances in Britain, however the first performance was at Thaxted church on May 27, 1917. The amateur choral societies that might have performed it were not reviewed in major publications.

The first Australian performance found was the Brisbane premiere of *A Festival Chime*, performed on November 23, 1927, in St Pauls Church, Spring Hill Brisbane. The concert, conducted by E.R.B. Jordan, included works by the Australian composer Arthur Benjamin, as well as Parry's *Jerusalem*. A newspaper preview gave context to the works:

The programme will include well-known and new music, presented in some instances through different mediums, such as a Bach "Fugue" performed on two harmoniums, and a movement from Grieg's pianoforte "Concerto," with the orchestral accompaniment played on the grand organ. Among the new music is a choral work by Arthur Benjamin, a Brisbane native, at present residing in England. One of his works has been accepted and published by the Carnegie Trust, a very high honour. Other new works include "A Festival Chime" by Gustav Holst, and "Jerusalem" by Sir Hubert Parry...²

E.R.B. Jordan may well have been in direct contact with Arthur Benjamin at some point, as the young Benjamin was Brisbane-born before embarking for travel to London and the Royal College of Music in 1911. Jordan was a prominent figure in music making in Brisbane, and had conducted the premiere of Holst's *Hymn of Jesus* with the State and Municipal Choir in 1923. The review for this concert was positive:

² "Church Concert," *The Brisbane Courier*, November 22, 1927, 6.

Mr. E. R. B. Jordan's desire in submitting a concert programme at St. Paul's Church, Leichhardt-street [sic], last night, in aid of the church choir funds, was to offer "something that is, perhaps, just a little bit different," and he certainly succeeded. He achieved this in the surroundings, in some items which have not previously been performed in Brisbane, and in others, which, though we'd known [them], were presented through different mediums... This is the first time it (the Benjamin) has been performed here, and the others which were introduced to a Brisbane audience were "Jerusalem" (Sir Hubert C. Parry) and "A Festival Chime" (Welsh melody, "St. Denio," arr Gustav Holst).³

The critic, aside from a statement of the works premiered, seemed to ignore any further requirement of his trade, with virtually no detail given about the actual performance. All that can be deduced was that the intentions behind the concert were to present music that was "a little bit different," and that in that endeavour Jordan had succeeded. This appeared to be an Australian premiere of the Holst, and with the other Parry too it could be speculated that Jordan – an Englishman by Birth – was receiving this music from Arthur Benjamin⁴ himself, who at the time in 1927 was professor of piano at the Royal College of Music in London.

³ "Concert at St. Paul's," *The Brisbane Courier*, November 26, 1927, 6.

⁴ Peter J. Pirie and Robert Barnett, "Benjamin, Arthur," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02697> (accessed September 29, 2014).

Scene de Nuit (from *Suite de Ballet*)

The *Suite de Ballet* is one of Holst's very early works, written in 1899.⁵ This Suite is representative of Holst's student work, and not the Holst of the 20th century that critics consistently noted as original and inventive. Imogen Holst gave a rather scathing description of this work:

During that same year [1899] he wrote the *Suite de Ballet*, a work that one can hardly listen to without flinching at the banality of its borrowed romanticism. The 'Danse Rustique' inevitably conjures up visions of a nineteenth-century operatic 'entry of peasants': he had got to wait another six years before hearing the folk-tunes that would have saved him from such inadequate writing. The Valse is even worse: the solidly built tune does its level best to get around as well as it can, but is held earth-bound by its flat-footed crotchets. A 'Scene du Nuit' meanders through pages and pages of stickily monotonous twelve-eight, and it is not until the 'Carnival' that the genuine Holst appears for a few brief moments, as in the opening staccato leap.⁶

Holst was usually his own most damning critic, but perhaps in this analysis, his daughter may have surpassed him! Imogen Holst's highlighting of the fact that it was still six years before Holst would start discovering the English folk-music that would have such a dramatic impact on his compositional voice, speaks to the presumed rudimentary nature of the piece. Three performances of the *Suite de Ballet*, or parts thereof, were given in England. The first was at the Royal College of Music in an all-

⁵ Amusingly, Imogen Holst chose to group works such as this in an early chapter of her book *The Music of Gustav Holst* under the title 'The Early Horrors.'

⁶ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 7-8.

English programme during the College's 'festival' in early July 1919.⁷ The next performance was more than a decade later and part of a concert at the Westminster School consisting entirely of works by Holst and Vaughan Williams.⁸ The critic in the review promotes the desirability of nationalism as the basis of 'modern' English music:

There is every reason why boys should understand modern music, however difficult adults may find it; there is every reason why English boys should feel a natural and unconscious sympathy with English music, however it may fall upon ears trained on the German classics...

The provocative idea about educating children with reference to their 'national' music, as a counterpoint to adults 'trained on the German classics' and therefore approaching this modern music with biased ears is an interesting point. It makes logical sense when reading a negative review of some of Holst's works where the critic was clearly negative about anything sounding different to Mozart or Beethoven. The performance itself was deemed competent, but no reception by the schoolboys was recorded. Again, more than a decade passed before another performance of this early Holst work. The venue was once again the Royal College of Music, and the critic was quite negative about the Holst:

Both works [Holst and a Fantasia-Variations by Hurlstone] had dated badly and were on that very account interesting as a reflection of the current style and idiom of the time. Holst in particular was astonishing: the first piece, a *Scene de nuit*, might almost have been by Chaminade....⁹

⁷ There was only a preview of this concert found – "The Week's Music," *The Times*, June 30, 1919, 10.

⁸ "Westminster School Concert," *The Times*, April 2, 1930, 17.

⁹ "Royal College of Music," *The Times*, October 17, 1947, 8.

The critic here seems to assume this work was written alongside *The Planets* and *St. Paul's Suite*, whereas in actuality it was the work of two decades earlier -the immature student Holst – having not yet discovered the folk-influences that would dramatically change his idiomatic and individual language. The only Australian performance discovered of this early Holst work was given in June 1921 in Victoria, where the reviewer stated:

An enjoyable evening's music was provided by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra at the Town Hall last night... A novelty, "Scene de Nuit," from a "Suite de Ballet," by the young English composer, Gustave [sic] Holst, won general admiration. It is charmingly melodious, which is surprising, as the composer keeps to a rhythmical basis that is almost monotonous. The scoring is fanciful and original... Mr Alberto Zelman conducted with much skill, and that enthusiasm which gives interest and attraction to all his efforts with the baton.¹⁰

Much of Holst's music contains strong rhythmic elements, most famously perhaps *Mars* from *The Planets* suite, but the vast majority of his music, it could be argued, places equal or more importance on melody and harmony. The critic's comments here, then, are odd and may be based of a lack of knowledge of the rest of the compositional output of Holst. Certainly, the works of the mature Holst who was more popular to critics and the public alike in the 1920s is a long way from this example of 1899.

The ballet music was clearly well received, and the description of the orchestration being original reflected the content of many British reviews of other works – Holst

¹⁰ "Symphony Orchestra," *The Argus*, June 16, 1921, 9.

was a ‘clever’ composer with his orchestration. That this particular movement from such an early work was performed points towards Zelman personally including it, as it was an extremely obscure piece to be programmed otherwise, given the level and popularity of Holst’s works from the 1910s, particularly in this period in 1921 when many of the more mature works were more prevalent.

Egdon Heath

An article appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1928 recounting the overseas voyage of one of the central figures of Holst’s musical performance in Australia - Arundel Orchard - and dealt with how some of this music heard while away translated back to performances in Australia:

Full of enthusiasm for the operas and orchestral works he had heard during his months in London, and in the various countries of Europe, the Director of the Conservatorium (Mr W. Arundel Orchard) returned to Sydney yesterday... He has brought with him the scores of many new orchestral works, which he hopes to conduct here shortly.

“One of the most interesting of these,” he said yesterday, “is Egdon Heath,” by Gustav Holst. This work is lighter than Holst’s suite, “The Planets,” which the Conservatorium Orchestra presented here so successfully, but the English public

does not seem to understand it. It has been presented only twice to my knowledge in England – once in London and once in the Midlands.¹¹

If it had not been for the personal visit of Arundel Orchard to Holst on his trip to London from New South Wales, the scores would not have found their way to Australia and into performance anywhere near as quickly as they did.¹² Orchard's reflection in the article about the English public's lack of understanding of Holst's music - which he cited as a reason for a lack of further performances of his works – was a key observation from a respected musician 'on the ground' in London. While it is impossible to ascertain in many circumstances, it is certain that experiences such as this were commonplace with travelling musicians of the day, and that in many instances performance of new music - Holst being no exception, - were given due to the conductor or performer bringing the music with them. This article clearly highlighted how particular acquaintances of the composer were vital in the championing of Holst's music in Australia.

This article was followed by another the following January, which outlined the year ahead for the Conservatorium orchestra:

Following upon the presentation of £388 to the Conservatorium by Jascha Heifetz in July last, a great deal of new music will be introduced at the Conservatorium concerts this year. This money, the famous violinist's share of the proceeds of a concert in which he appeared with the Conservatorium Orchestra, has been set aside for the purchase of orchestral works, to be kept in

¹¹ "Mr Arundel Orchard's Tour," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 31, 1928, 9.

¹² Other scores Orchard reportedly brought back from his tour besides *Egdon Heath* included Elgar's *Froissart* Overture Op 19, several Schubert symphonies, Mozart and Glazinov Symphonies, and other overtures by Wagner.

a separate collection, to be known as the Heifetz Library. This library has now assumed important dimensions. Dr. Orchard, the Director of the Conservatorium, took the opportunity in his recent tour of Europe, to purchase many new scores, and some of these are to be heard in the coming season....

Dr. Orchard proposes to open the season with the production in concert form of the first act of "The Valkyrie." He has also marked Sir Edward Elgar's great work, "The Dream of Gerontius," for early production. This was first produced in Sydney many years ago under the baton of the late Mr. Delaney, and was later performed here under Sir Henry Coward's direction by the Sheffield Choir.

Dr. Orchard has secured Holst's new orchestral piece, "Egdon Heath," played for the first time in London recently at one of the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts. This work, which the director will introduce this season, possesses unique interest from the fact that it records the impressions left upon the mind of the composer in a morning walk with Thomas Hardy not long before Mr. Hardy's death.

As already announced, two operas, Mozart's "Cosi Fan Tutte" and Vaughan Williams "Hugh the Drover," will be produced – the first in May and the second in August. "Hugh the Drover" will be preceded by a new ballet by Holst, "The Golden Goose."¹³

This article provided further insight into how scores of Holst's music came to be at what was clearly the epicentre for his music and performance in Australia – responsibility attributed to the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. It seemed the vast majority of the music purchased was 'new' music, with a very British

¹³ "Conservatorium – New Music," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 16, 1929, 12.

tinge.¹⁴ While the announcement of a performance of *Egdon Heath* is clear, no newspaper review was found to suggest it took place, however, the clear evidence as to *how* the work came to Australia is of vital importance when considering the role of those championing Holst's music.

Country Song and Marching Song

Holst's *Country Song* and *Marching Song* were written in 1906 and published as the *Two Songs without Words* op. 22 for Small Orchestra by Novello. These works are another example of early Holst, but unlike the *Suite de Ballet* of 1899, this was transitional Holst, with newfound folk influences creeping in to replace Wagnerian romanticism. Imogen Holst acknowledged his developmental originality in the *Country Song*, citing how the opening tune for unaccompanied clarinet, was revealing the newfound inspiration from the discovery of his folk tunes. She however highlighted that the bridge passage soon after reveals "familiar quotations from Wagner."¹⁵ Imogen deemed her father to have been more 'successful' in *Marching Song* in terms of establishing an effective mood,¹⁶ where "only one passage is

¹⁴ This interest in the programmatic side of *Egdon Heath* can be seen again in an article ("Music in Paris" – *The Brisbane Courier*, December 14, 1929) where "under the authoritative baton of M. Pierre Monteux, the Paris Symphony Orchestra on October 20 [1929] gave the first audition of 'Egdon Heath,' by the noted English composer, Gustav Holst. An evocation in music of the country about which Thomas Hardy wrote in 'The Return of the Native,' the work succeeds admirably in conveying the somber monotony of the Wessex landscape, and is novel in that it uses no percussion instruments."

¹⁵ And in this case Imogen Holst points out that "this time it is the Wagner of the Siegfried Idyll." Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 18.

¹⁶ Imogen Holst noted that Holst shared this mood of 'somber vitality' with Hardy. *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 18.

unsatisfactory, where the modulating sequences are over-deliberate, and the melodrama sounds as if it has been stuck on to the surface of the music.”¹⁷

The orchestral *Songs Without Words* in Australia are curious, in that performances of such early works of Holst being mounted in the 1920s and 1930s would have almost certainly required specific programming. These are not the headliners like *The Planets*, *Savitri*, or *The Hymn of Jesus* – important and popular works in their genres – these are developmental pieces of a composer finding his voice. In October 1928, a concert was given by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra under Fritz Hart that contained the *Two Songs Without Words*. While the centrepiece of this programme was Schubert’s C Major Symphony, the Melbourne premiere performances of two of Holst’s smaller scale works were seen as important.¹⁸

To-night [sic] in the Town Hall the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, under Mr. Fritz Hart, will give the final concert of its present orchestral season. A more than usually attractive programme has been arranged, with the C Major Symphony, Schubert’s great masterpiece, as the principal item... Among other items, the most important will be the performance for the first time in Melbourne of two short orchestral works by Gustav Holst, “Country Song,” and “Marching Song.” Popular prices will be charged. Tickets can be obtained at Allan’s, or to-night at the doors.

¹⁷ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 18. Listening to the work, Imogen Holst’s point can be heard clearly – this early Holst does sound like the modulatory passages towards the end of the work could well have been taken from elsewhere and placed in the score. It is conspicuous in a work that seemingly would benefit from the opposite.

¹⁸ “Orchestral Concert,” *The Argus*, October 20, 1928, 20.

The *Two Songs Without Words* were deemed more important than the other items on the programme possibly due to it being their premiere. Perhaps, too, the author may have been referring to Holst's stature as a contemporary composer with this statement. The review of the concert was extremely detailed and very supportive of Holst's work:

The concentrated attention of the listeners, the variety and interest of the programme, and the general excellence of the performances were some of the conspicuous features of the concert given on Saturday night in the Melbourne Town Hall, before an audience which completely filled the building. The performers were the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, under Mr. Fritz Hart, and the occasion was the fifth and last concert of the present season... If a barometer of applause had been set up in the hall for this concert the highest reading would have occurred at the conclusion of Mr. Louis Lavater's hornpipe in G, and Gustav Holst's "Marching Song" would have come a good second....

Holst's "Marching Song,"... had to be repeated, was preceded by another of its composer's "middle period" writings, a genuinely beautiful country song [sic]. Holst in his later developments has puzzled and disappointed some of his old admirers. Writing of the works played on Saturday night, Mr. Hart, in his admirable annotation, said: - "These two beautiful pieces for orchestra represent the composer in his most delightful moods. Thoroughly characteristic... they are yet easily 'immediate' in their appeal. Even at a first hearing they render themselves ungratefully and convincingly to all music lovers." This is all perfectly true. The "Country Song" has the real fresh-air feeling, and that strong sense of kinship with nature which one finds in such poets as Wordsworth and Keats. The "Marching Song" is rhythmical without being

banal, and original without being at all freakish. These two pieces, nod [sic] first heard in Australia, should be repeated at the earliest opportunity: they are sure of a hearty welcome...

Under Mr. Hart's skilful and experienced direction...the two Holst pieces, save for one or two minor blemishes, came out admirably.¹⁹

In the way that this review closely examines the works on the programme, it is quite refreshing and certainly not the norm (if the other 'reviews' of Holst's music are the standard). The language used throughout is peppered with positive adjectives and the highest of praise, as well as conveying what Fritz Hart said in detail. It is interesting to note the opinions written by Hart about the works being "thoroughly characteristic" – an analysis not shared in Imogen Holst's account of the works, where she highlights the Wagnerian tendencies still mixed in to the then-newfound folk voice. However, Hart would have been well acquainted with Holst's student works, so to him they may have sounded quite characteristic. Hart's comment that the works appealed immediately on first hearing was certainly not true of many of Holst's other works, such as *The Hymn of Jesus* which was exceptionally jarring to the Brisbane audience at its Australian premiere, according to the critic at that performance. Hart continued with a plea to the public for a repetition of the works. There is clearly no doubt about Hart's commitment to Holst's music and its performances. An interesting description from the critic, that the *Marching Song* was "original without being at all freakish" perhaps sheds light on the view of contemporary music at the time and "originality," presumably conveying the message that 'this does not sound like Beethoven or Mozart' to the more conservative ears. When thinking of the word 'freakish' in reference to Holst's music it is difficult to forget Robin Legge, the British critic,

¹⁹ "Symphony Orchestra – Successful Concert," *The Argus*, October 22, 1928, 10.

writing of Holst's *Beni Mora*, "We do not ask for Biakra dancing-girls in Langham-Place, however clever their representation."²⁰ There is something freakish and shocking about 'different' sounding music to 'sensible' ears. To investigate that point a little more deeply, in contemporary terms, listeners now have access to music from every historical era, social context and geographic location, and it is all accessible instantaneously. Musicians can synthesize all previous musical thought. Every musical style, unusual sound, revolutionary impulse or aesthetic ideal can be incorporated into new music and audiences expect to be excited and challenged by what they are hearing. Turning the clock back however to the early nineteenth centuries, audience expectation narrowed down to anticipating what was considered 'acceptable' and 'pleasant' music of the day usually treated anything outside of that narrow boundary and certainly what could be construed as 'new music' as an affront that was not only 'different', but altogether 'freakish' and shocking'. Thankfully, this critic is highlighting the opposite about Holst's *Two Songs Without Words*, with a very generous reception despite "one or two minor blemishes" in the performance.

Holst's *Marching Song* was performed again on Saturday August 20, 1932, in a concert by the Malvern Orchestra in Victoria in a programme that also included works by Elgar and Delius. The review, which appeared the following Monday provides a scathing indictment of the Orchestra's performance.²¹

After a preliminary period of exceptionally rapid development, that youthful organisation, the Malvern Symphony Orchestra has reached the uncomfortable

²⁰ Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 63.

²¹ "Mozart and Elgar," *The Argus*, August 22, 1932, 3.

stage of musical adolescence. Before selecting any further programmes it would be advisable for the conductor, Mr. William Mallinson, to attempt a thorough “stocktaking” of the resources at his command....

Both elementary and advanced musical organisations can indulge with impunity in ambitious programmes, but the Malvern orchestra [sic] belongs to neither category, and such works as the Mozart Symphony in C, No. 36, and Gustav Holst’s splendidly primitive “Marching Song,” as performed on Saturday night, serve only to emphasize the immaturity of its style.

What is primitive about the *Marching Song* might be the rhythmic march – but Imogen Holst interpreted that as more ‘noble,’ and the previous performance’s critic noted it as “rhythmic but not banal.” The critic here certainly might have been bringing to the fore his predisposition for modern music and might have missed entirely the folk-aspect of the work’s construction.

The next performance of the *Marching Song* came on the December 3, 1933, in an outdoor concert conducted by Fritz Hart at the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne. In this concert, it was noted by the critic that Hart spoke before each work, which was appreciated by the audience. The reviewer also noted of the outdoor venue:

Not a note was lost, and the varied programme gave obvious satisfaction to several hundreds of people. Windy conditions caused some harassed moments when music was blown away and stands went spinning: but none of these

mishaps seemed to be in the least serious. Indeed, they helped to add good humour and spontaneity to the performance.²²

This performance is conveyed as a fun-filled and successful event, and the large crowd mentioned enjoyed the programme that aside from the Holst work, included an *Overture* by Gounod, a Symphony in E flat by Haydn, a movement of the *Scotch Symphony* by Mendelssohn, and string music by Grieg and Fritz Hart.

The *Marching Song* continued its run of performances the following year, with a preview for Music Week in Sydney outlining a concert that saw it paired as intended with the other of the *Songs Without Words*, the *Country Song*.²³

The principal Music Week event to-day [sic] will be a concert in the evening at the Conservatorium Hall. The second part of the programme is a memorial to Gustav Holst and Sir Edward Elgar. Of Holst, it includes the “Country Song” and “Marching Song;” and of Elgar, a “Wand of Youth” Suite and some smaller works. Mr. Fritz Hart will conduct the Broadcasting Commission’s Orchestra in a series of his own compositions.

There was no review of this performance to be found, and no clues as to how the audience received the work.

²² “Music in the Gardens,” *The Argus*, December 4, 1933, 5.

²³ “To-Day’s Programme,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 30, 1934, 6.

Somerset Rhapsody

A preview announcement for the Australian Premiere of Holst's *Somerset Rhapsody* appeared in an article early in 1940. The article discussed an important issue surrounding Holst's performance in Australia – disruptions due to the war:

Yehudi Menuhin has changed his mind about giving concerts in Australia. He will arrive in Sydney on Monday, and play in Sydney twice next month. No details are available yet concerning programmes.

Owing to the war's effect on sea travel, the Broadcasting Commission has been in difficulties concerning its celebrities from abroad, Harold Williams was delayed in arriving, and had to miss an opera broadcast. Maria Markan, who should already have given recitals in Sydney, is still on the high seas. The Icelandic soprano, however, will arrive next week, and will begin her tour in Canberra, the occasion being a concert to aid Lady Gowrie's Red Cross Appeal. She will face the Sydney public at an orchestral concert which Bernard Heinze is to conduct on April 27. The programme of her recitals include songs by Icelandic, Danish, Norwegian, Finnish, and British composers. Kenneth Neate will be the assisting artist, and Carl Bartling the accompanist. Professor Heinze's orchestral programme comprises the Vivaldi Concerto in D Minor, the First Symphony of Brahms, Wagner's "Rienzi" Overture, and the first Australian performance of the "Somerset Rhapsody" by Gustav Holst.²⁴

²⁴ "Musical Events," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 13, 1940, 12.

The article continues by discussing the touring of the orchestras between states. No review of this performance of the *Somerset Rhapsody* could be found.

Just beyond the 1950 point where this examination ends, there was a performance given in Tasmania, with a preview appearing on October 3, 1952:

Gustav Holst, known principally through his “The Planets,” wrote a great number of works on a smaller scale, and his “Somerset Rhapsody” is one of them.

This rhapsody is a selection and arrangement of folk tunes and, as such, its attraction (the work is as yet unknown to me) probably lies in the orchestration.²⁵

The vagueness of the critic in discussing Holst’s music shows an honest reflection of the struggle of a contemporary composer (especially in what must be considered a remote location in Australia in terms of contemporary music making in the 1950s). Here again Holst is reduced to his famous *Planets* suite, with all of his other works, mostly remaining unnamed and unknown. That the critic stated the work was unknown to him is unsurprising, but noting the attraction “probably lies in the orchestration” shows quite clearly what many critics in Britain had said about Holst being a “clever” composer, particularly in his efficiency and technique with orchestration. It had been proven in *The Planets*, so there was every cause for belief that it was present here. The somewhat casual language and tone describing Holst and the *Somerset Rhapsody* here was an accurate reflection of the perception of Holst held by those outside his close circle of friends and supporters. Sadly there was no

²⁵ Walter Stiasny, “Important Place,” *The Mercury*, October 3, 1952, 9.

follow up review to show what pearls of wisdom the critic might have revealed of the *Somerset Rhapsody* or how its audience received it.

There were eight records of performances of *A Somerset Rhapsody* found in Britain between 1910 and 1937, where it was clearly very well received. It was universally praised for its strong English character and it was clearly being heralded as desirable for the nation to produce its own great music independent of Germanic influences. The Australian performances did not commence until years after the last British performance was found (for the scope of this thesis at least), and there is only one image given from the two performances completed: that the composition was not known but Holst's reputation led one critic to believe it would most likely be well orchestrated.

Japanese Suite

Holst wrote his *Japanese Suite* in 1915, after beginning work on the famous *Planets* suite. The work is a series of oriental dances, and contains a parallel to the light and rhythmic "Mercury" from *The Planets* in its "Marionette Dance," perhaps its most recognizable section.²⁶ Its first performance in Australia took place in Perth in December 1935, by the West Guilford Orchestral Society, conducted by Charles Gamba. A review of the concert, by 'Fidelio,' is enthusiastic in the encouragement of the suburban music makers, stating:

²⁶ The *Japanese Suite* could not escape Imogen Holst's criticism, and her summation of the work was that "most of it is disappointing." *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 34-35.

Another exceptionally interesting (and enterprising) inclusion was a “Japanese Suite,” which the late Gustav Holst composed in 1916. Here one had presumably genuine Eastern tunes and intriguing exotic colourings and harmonisation – for instance, a solo flute tune against light string pizzicato.²⁷

The language used by the critic reflects excitement for Holst’s work, describing the *Japanese Suite* as an exceptionally interesting and enterprising work. The ‘exotic’ nature of the suite clearly left an impression on the critic, as it must have done on the audience. How the music was programmed is unknown, but it must be assumed that the conductor Charles Gamba was responsible, given the amateur nature of the West Guilford Orchestral Society. The next performance was given in Melbourne the following year, but only the preview can be found:

British composers will be represented at the open-air concert to be given by the Melbourne Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra in the Botanic Gardens on Sunday, April 27. Gustav Holst’s unusual “Japanese Suite” will have its first performance in Australia, and Coleridge-Taylor’s “Petite Suite de Concert” will also be played. A collection will be taken for Navy House Appeal.²⁸

Not for the first time for Holst performances in Australia, the critic incorrectly states this was a first performance when it was the second. The description of the suite as ‘unusual’ could be construed as carrying a negative connotation, especially in comparison with the language used by the critic in Western Australia, where the exotic nature of the *Japanese Suite* was conveyed as exceptionally interesting, and enterprising.

²⁷ *The West Australian*, December 6, 1935, 20.

²⁸ “Concert in Gardens,” *The Argus*, April 7, 1941, 2.

Seven Scottish Airs

The *Seven Scottish Airs* (1907) were written at the beginning of Holst's discovery and use of folk melodies.²⁹ Imogen Holst explained that this work was among the first 'successful' compositions during the experimentation phase of the extended use of folk tunes in his writing.³⁰ There was no performance coverage found in Britain, only a brief discussion of the score, where the commentator noted: "A capital set of arrangements of seven Scottish airs that are none too well known is made by G. von Holst... given in one charmingly characteristic movement."³¹ The only performance found in Australia appeared in 1944 as part of the British Music Society's concert series for young people. The concert preview stated:

Demonstrations by boys of the Melbourne Junior Orchestra will be a feature of the British Music Society concerts for young people, which will be held at the Assembly Hall Collins St, on Saturdays, July 22 and 29, at 10.15...

Artists will include Clive Carey, Cecelia Kilduff, Emerald Hills, Dorothy Roxburgh, Athos Martelli, Freda Manners-Sutton, with Peggy Priestley.

²⁹ While there is no explanation offered by Imogen Holst or other sources as to Holst's choice of using Scottish folk-melodies, his general pursuit of any musical ideas that pleased him at any given time would strengthen the portrait painted by Imogen and others in biographical and analytical accounts that he had no regard for convention. He was invigorated by English folk-tunes and exploring their use in the early twentieth century, but by no means would he have considered restricting himself to them over any other source.

³⁰ Compared to other works in this early experimentation category, being labeled as successful by Imogen Holst is high praise indeed! Other works, such as an orchestral work by the name of *Songs of the West* using folk-songs she labeled "a distressing failure." Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 18.

³¹ "New Chamber Music," *The Times*, June 2, 1909, 13.

The programme will include the sonata [sic] No. 6 in E minor, by Thomas Arne, eight English folk songs, and seven Scottish airs by Gustav Holst.³²

Sadly, no review for the Melbourne Junior Orchestra's concert could be found.³³ The folk-song nature of the work and its reception by an Australian audience would have been interesting to compare with Holst's other music.

The Wandering Scholar

By the 1930s Holst was in the public eye more than he ever had been before, and Australian articles were occasionally giving 'updates' about the composer and his music. There was certainly a level of prominence given to him on the British musical scene, to the point where an article from December 1930 reads more like a gossip column:

The friends of Gustav Holst were aware last year that he was engaged on a new opera, but the composer has a deep-rooted objection to public announcements of unfinished compositions. It can now be stated, however, that the work is called "The Wandering Scholar": it is on a libretto of Clifford Bax, Arnold Bax's brother. The subject is merry, the setting medieval. It is a little one-act work with small orchestra, and lasts in all some 20 minutes.³⁴

³² "Concerts for Young People," *The Argus*, July 17, 1944, 6.

³³ This is not a surprise, as reviews are not commonly written of junior orchestra performances. That the first performance in Australia was by schoolchildren may suggest that it was used in the same way in England, explaining the lack of evidence of performances there.

³⁴ "New English Opera," *The Brisbane Courier*, December 20, 1930, 19.

This gossiping style reporting would continue in the same manner in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, with an article two years later discussing Holst's *Hammersmith*:

“Hammersmith,” a new work by Gustav Holst, was performed in London at the Queen’s Hall on November 25 by the British Broadcasting Orchestra. Miss Gertrude Mack, who was present, describes the music as quite fascinating. She writes: - “The composer says he has not set out to represent definite scenes, but to express something of his feelings about Hammersmith after living 37 years in the district. The orchestra opens quietly with smoothly-flowing [sic] violins, giving the river ‘motif’ – the dark river moving always, and scarcely noticed among the noise and life about it. Then comes squeaks and sudden noises from wind instruments – the voices of street vendors shouting their wares: and over that again comes a deep-toned roar from brasses and big bass – the roar of traffic across Hammersmith Bridge. Voices and sounds of traffic mingle together, die away, and again the smoothly-flowing violins are heard – the dark river moving on for ever and unnoticed. Vitality, the throb of life, and the serenity of nature, are woven together into this short but interesting composition.”³⁵

Gertrude Mack seems to be placing large amounts of programmatic intention which she herself stated here that Holst had denied as being behind the work; but Holst’s work into the 1930s was still being seen as very ‘interesting’ and ‘quite fascinating’ – certainly not the most positive adjectives seen in reviews of Holst’s music throughout performances in Australia and Britain, but also far from scathing.

³⁵ “New Work by Holst,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 9, 1932, 6.

Holst performances without information

There are some reports of Holst's orchestral music performances found that are without information regarding which works were performed, which warrant a small discussion here for the sake of completeness. It is highly likely that these may have been performances of more popular works, such as the *St. Paul's Suite* or movements from *The Planets*, however this is merely speculation. A review from a concert given on November 28, 1953, was very vague on details:

A large crowd attended the orchestral concert given by Sydney Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Joseph Post, in the open air at St. Leonard's Park, North Sydney, last night.

It was the first of a series of free summer concerts arranged by the N.S.W. Government, Sydney City Council, and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

The programme included music by Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, and Gustav Holst.³⁶

With Joseph Post conducting the Sydney Symphony, it may hint that this performance was of movements from *The Planets*, which he had conducted with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 1948, and again with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1951. On both occasions four movements were given – “Mercury,” “Venus,” “Mars,” and “Jupiter.” It is highly likely that the Holst piece performed by the large Sydney Symphony could have comprised parts of his most popular work.

³⁶ “Park Concert Well Attended,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 30, 1953, 4.

The next performance was during a concert given to see Peggy Glanville-Hicks off on her way to England. It was a complimentary concert that was conducted by Fritz Hart and featured friends of the artist, and members of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.³⁷ There was little revealed about what was performed, however Hart conducted *St Paul's Suite* two years later in 1934, so it is possible that the reduced orchestra containing 'members of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra' would have been the appropriate string ensemble required. Another possibility for Hart would be the *Marching Song*, which he had performed several times in Melbourne during this period.

Whilst the performances of the smaller orchestral works of Holst were few and far between, reviews and discussion surrounding them in the media were still very complimentary. There was still the generic "Holst is a clever composer, but nothing more" feeling given in the tone and language of many reviews, but (particularly as all the performances mentioned in this chapter were toward the end of Holst's life and beyond) there was still many signs that Holst was exceptionally well known and well received by audiences hearing his music. It should come as no surprise that many of the familiar names cropped up in charge of performances, such as Orchard, Post, Heinze, and Jordan. However as most were isolated performances, it hasn't been possible to see a pattern forming which would show how subsequent performances might have come about, as we have been able to do with more major works discussed previously. The main thread to take away from this investigation of minor works of the composer is that almost against all odds, the music was surfacing for the benefit of Australian listeners, and the seminal role of the 'champions' of Holst's work in Australia that kept it alive will begin to crystalize over the final two chapters.

³⁷ *The Argus*, June 3, 1932, 8.

Chapter 9 – Vocal and Choral Works

This chapter will turn its focus towards the performances of Holst's vocal and choral output in Australia. As with the previous chapter, the works will be discussed individually (maintaining a chronological discussion for each work) as exploring the performance history of all the works together and chronologically becomes difficult in the context of the sheer volume of smaller works presented here. These smaller works, too, were in many cases 'extras' on programmes or songs in recital programmes, so it is reasonable to expect that less attention will be paid to them including what the response the audience will have to the works.¹

This analysis also works on the assumption that although nearly seventy performances of the vocal and choral works of Holst are found within the scope of this thesis, there may be more that were part of amateur recitals or choral concerts that remain hidden (either unreviewed or because the tools for discovering them are not yet available.) The scores for many of these smaller-scale works, too, were difficult to obtain. In the preface to *The Music of Gustav Holst*, Imogen Holst pointed out that in 1950, many of Holst's mature works were not yet recorded, and full manuscript scores could still only be hired in Britain. She commented that, "many of the choral works that have since been republished were then unobtainable,"² which gives another perspective to the difficulty contemporary choral and vocal works had in receiving performances internationally

¹ It would be hard to imagine a two-minute song eliciting the same reaction from an average audience member to a large-scale work such as *The Planets* or *The Hymn of Jesus*.

² Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), preface.

Songs from *The Princess* Op. 20A (1905)

Date	Year	State	Group	Conductor
October 15	1908	NSW	Sydney Madrigal Society	Arundel Orchard
July 8	1909	NSW	Sydney Madrigal Society	Arundel Orchard
November 29	1923	NSW	Sydney Madrigal Society	Frederick Mewton
October 2	1926	VIC	Cecilia Choir	Minnie Bull
March 26	1927	QLD	Musical Union	Unspecified
November 21	1935	WA	Ladies Odeon Choir	N.E. Moran

Figure 9.1 – Australian Performances of Songs from *The Princess*

Holst's Songs from *The Princess* comprises six partsongs for unaccompanied female voices written in 1905 and published by Novello. The six songs, inspired by poems from Alfred Lord Tennyson, are in order: "Sweet and low"; "The splendour falls"; "Tears, idle tears"; "O Swallow, Swallow"; "Home they brought her warrior dead"; "Now sleeps the crimson petal."

The first Australian performance was given on October 15, 1908, which contained three of the six songs of *The Princess* set – "The splendour falls," "Tears, idle tears," and "O Swallow, Swallow." This performance was given by the Sydney Madrigal Society under the direction of Arundel Orchard in the Y.M.C.A Hall in Sydney. The first of two previews contained a brief outline of some of the works to be sung. At this early point in 1908 the preview refers to the composer as "Gustav Von Holst."³ The next preview note appeared several days later, where a small paragraph revealed a condensed version of the October 10 preview.⁴ The day after the performance, a review was found in the "Amusements" section of the newspaper:

The Sydney Madrigal and Chamber Music Society has an almost inexhaustible treasury of part-songs to draw upon, and as long as they continue to sustain the spirit of enterprise and ambition which has marked the present season, their concerts can never fail to prove of novel and varied interest...

Gustav Von Holst's setting for female voices of three of the separate poems interleaved by Tennyson in "The Princess," revealed a quite remarkable originality. "The Splendour Falls" involved a second choir of ladies' voices at a remove, designed to give colour to the "echo" passages at the words "Blow, Bugle, Blow." The under-voices in both choirs partially failed to keep up the concert pitch in the very crabbed harmonies of the opening passages, apart from which the rendering was beautiful.

³ "Sydney Madrigal Society," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 10, 1908, 16.

⁴ "Concert Engagements," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 14, 1908, 10.

“Tear, Idle Tears,” and the rapid and captivating expression of “O Swallow, Swallow,” in which the enunciation of the singers was neat, completed the group.⁵

The Holst of remarkable originality was not an uncommon descriptor in reviews (particularly in Britain, where it seemed almost a ‘sound-bite’ attached to many Holst reviews), however in this case both the performance, and the work are early in Holst’s career. The critic used language such as ‘captivating’ to describe the work, and while the struggles of the actual performance were highlighted alongside the triumphs, the part-songs seemed to leave a very positive impression.

The following year in 1909 the only other performance reviewed before the First World War. Again it was the Sydney Madrigal Society under Arundel Orchard that gave the performance, this time at St. James’s Hall on July 8. The reviewer commented:

The captivating flow of vocal harmony which animates these concerts gives them an indescribable charm, though it must be admitted with a sigh that it too often takes a melancholy turn... That they [the choir] delivered the whole with a great deal of animation and varied expression bore witness to the proficiency they have now acquired in the delivery of unaccompanied music. “Now Spring in all her Glory,” by Jacques Arkadelt (1545), Brahms’ “The Serenade,” Coleridge Taylor’s much too lugubrious “By the Lone Seashore,” James Shaw’s “Under the Greenwood Tree,” Percy Pitt’s richly-harmonised “A Love Symphony,” Gustav von Holst’s [sic] too difficult “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal” (soprano solo by Miss Daisy Gooch), and John Stainer’s “Prithce Why So Pale,” completed a goodly list of enjoyable numbers...”⁶

⁵ “Sydney Madrigal Society,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 16, 1908, 10.

⁶ “Sydney Madrigal Society,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 9, 1909, 8.

The change of tone between the evaluation of the same choral work by Holst in 1908 as demonstrating “quite remarkable originality” and in 1909 being categorised as “too difficult” is interesting to note, given that both the ensemble and conductor are the same and the performances are less than a year apart. The work does not present itself as overly technically demanding of a choir – the moving a Capella accompaniment of the lower voices presenting the only challenge of any note.⁷ This could be a case of the ensemble making the music sound beyond their technical reach, however the critic specifically notes the skill the ensemble had achieved in unaccompanied music, which would indicate this not to be the case. Despite the comment regarding the difficulty of the Holst work, it was included amongst the critic’s list of enjoyed numbers, however the audience reception was not recorded.

The Sydney Madrigal Society, which was at this stage conducted by Frederick Mewton, performed Holst’s “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal” in a concert almost 15 years after their previous rendition. The review discussed Mewton having become the successor to Arundel Orchard as the new conductor of the ensemble and that the number of singers had increased to “about eighty,” as well as there being “a crowded audience” at the Conservatorium Hall. The review of the Songs from *The Princess* went on to exclaim:

The ladies alone sang Gustav Holst’s “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal,” in which an ethereal enchantment was suggested in dissonances and unusual harmonies in illustration of the magical repose of sleeping Earth. In complete contrast was the whimsical vigour and quaint directness of Rutland Boughton’s “Meg Merrilies.” It was smartly presented, and the applause justified the repeat...⁸

It seemed that the Songs from *The Princess* were in the Society’s permanent repertoire, though after the two performances pre-1910, they seemed to have gathered dust for nearly 15

⁷ This accompaniment style occurs from bar 4 and is present throughout the work. It is cited here as a possible explanation to the critic’s comment, however, whether an average chorister would classify this accompaniment figure as difficult is subjective.

⁸ “Madrigal Society,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 30, 1923, 10.

years. The critic approached the dissonant compositional language favourably (which certainly cannot be seen as the norm for critics when discussing some of Holst's more idiosyncratic techniques), finding 'ethereal enchantment' instead of a jarring or ugly new sound. This critic may not have been fully aware of much of Holst's output, however, as the harmony used is more 'mainstream' and less idiosyncratically dissonant Holst than much of the composer's output. The 15 years passing between performances, too, could have seen a shift in the musical taste of the critic and the community.

The remaining two performances of the Songs were given by different ensembles and in different states, the first being the Cecilia Choir in Victoria on October 2, 1926. A review appeared two days after the performance:

No lack of variety existed in the programme presented by the Musical Society of Victoria at its eighth concert of the season at the Assembly Hall on Saturday night. The programme was the 252nd given under the auspices of the society.

In addition [to the rest of the programme], Miss Bull conducted the Cecilia Choir of Women in a group of songs from "The Princess," set to music by Gustav Holst. In two of these, "Sweet and Low" and "The Splendour Falls," Holst uses his favourite device of a hidden chorus with pleasing effect. The singing was well balanced.⁹

The performance was reviewed positively overall, although the critic neglected details such as the audience reception and crowd size in the Assembly Hall. It was also noted that using a hidden chorus was Holst's 'favourite device,' which, while containing *some* grains of truth in that he used hidden choirs in some works, is just this critic's opinion.¹⁰ It is unclear if all six songs were performed, with only two specifically mentioned in "a group of songs."

⁹ "Musical Society's Concert," *The Argus*, October 4, 1926, 13.

¹⁰ There are many devices Holst employs in his compositional language, such as descending and repeating figures, but he would later use a modification of this choral device to stunning effect in

The first song from the set, “Sweet and Low,” was used as a competition piece in the Queensland eisteddfod in July 1927.¹¹ There was no elaboration on the use of the Holst song, merely the statement of its inclusion.

The final performance of Songs from *The Princess* was the song “O Swallow, Swallow,” given in a concert by the Ladies Odeon Society in Perth on November 21, 1935. The review only mentions in passing the Holst, but noted the quality of the sopranos’ execution in the ensemble.¹²

Arundel Orchard was responsible for introducing and conducting the work with the Sydney Madrigal Society in 1908 and again in 1909. The Society continued under Mewton after Orchard’s departure with another performance in 1923, so the importance of Orchard in establishing Holst’s music in an Australian ensembles’ repertoire can be seen. Only one report of a British performance was found – a broadcast by the B.B.C. Orchestra – on January 8, 1938.¹³ Other performances were sure to have occurred. Pupils and amateur ensembles that Holst worked with - even if they were not reviewed - would most certainly have performed these songs around London and Thaxted.

“Neptune” to fade out at the end of *The Planets* suite. There certainly was no indication that Holst had relayed the information that a hidden chorus was his favorite device to this critic or elsewhere.

¹¹ “Musical Union Concert,” *Morning Bulletin*, March 26, 1927, 8.

¹² “Ladies Odeon Society,” *The West Australian*, November 22, 1935, 11.

¹³ “Broadcasting,” *The Times*, January 8, 1938, 15.

Seven Part-Songs Op. 44 (Words by Robert Bridges, 1925-26)

Date	Year	State	Singer	Conductor
October 19	1927	VIC	Cecilia Choir	Minnie Bull
October 27	1927	VIC	Cecilia Choir	Minnie Bull
November 25	1927	VIC	Albert St Conservatorium	Unspecified
September 21	1940	WA	Oriana Ladies Society	A.J. Leckie

Figure 9.2 – Australian Performances of the Seven Part-Songs Op. 44

The first performance of at least some of the Seven Part-Songs were given by the Cecilia Choir in Victoria, who had performed Holst's Songs from *The Princess* the year before.¹⁴

Performed on October 19, 1927, the review commented:

The programme of any concert given under the auspices of Mr. Harold Browning can always be counted upon to provide much fine music set to genuine poetry. The programme of the vocal recital given last night in the Assembly Hall was no exception to this rule. Great names were there in abundance, and while such Continental composers... were worthily represented, there were also fine examples of the best English writers. It is a question whether their songs and their choral music, sacred and secular, do not show twentieth century British composers in their most characteristic and pleasing vein.... A women's choir sang part-songs by Gustav Holst and Thomas Morley in a most delightful manner; their tone, expression, rhythm, and annunciation were worthy of all praise.¹⁵

Holst was undoubtedly grouped among "the best English writers" – however, that a new work such as the Seven Part-Songs were selected over some of the more popular established works

¹⁴ It is certain that this performance is referring to the Seven Part-Songs, as the Cecilia choir gave a performance of Holst again barely a week later where it is mentioned the songs were on poems by Robert Bridges.

¹⁵ "Vocal Recital," *The Argus*, October 20, 1927, 4.

to represent Holst toward the end of the 1920s could be considered a strange choice. That being said, the Cecilia Choir under Minnie Bull had been demonstrating a willingness to explore the music of the contemporary British scene.

The Cecilia Choir then gave the next performance on October 27, 1927, with a short preview notice highlighting the content: “The Cecilia Choir of Women will give a recital in the Assembly Hall on October 27. ‘Hecuba’s Lament’ and six new songs by Holst will be sung.”¹⁶ The following review was given the day after the concert:

Under that very skilful conductress, Madame Minnie Bull, the Cecilia Choir of women can always be depended upon for admirable performances of interesting and beautiful music. Last night at a concert given in the Assembly Hall part-songs of various kinds were sung in a manner which called for the most enthusiastic admiration. The first item, an arrangement of a madrigal by Thomas Weelkes, revealed the extreme efficiency of the choir and the great skill of its conductress.... Two works by Gustav Holst, scored for chorus and strings, contained many difficulties which might well daunt all but the stout-hearted [sic]. The choir not only surmounted these difficulties with apparent ease, but also had freedom for expression of the most intelligent kind. Some poems by Robert Bridges are rather tedious stuff, and the music they evoked in the mind of Holst partakes of their foolishness.¹⁷

The critic might not have appreciated Bridges’ poetry,¹⁸ but seemed to find Holst’s musical setting satisfactory. The vagueness surrounding the reporting on choral concerts at times can provide a challenge to overcome (particularly in an analytical study like the one being undertaken in this thesis) – in determining which works were being performed. This critic merely noted there were “two works by Gustav Holst, scored for chorus and strings.” It is

¹⁶ “Choir of Women,” *The Argus*, October 17, 1927, 22.

¹⁷ “Choral Concert,” *The Argus*, October 28, 1927, 6.

¹⁸ The poems used for the seven songs were: Say, who is this?; O love, I complain; Angel spirits of sleep; When first we met; Sorrow and Joy; Love on my heart; Assemble, all ye maidens.

lucky then that the offhand comment about Bridges' poetry was made, allowing the identification of the Holst Op 44 (generally speaking- the specific songs were not mentioned). This vagueness is sadly all too common, particularly in smaller works reviewed around Australia.

Staying in Melbourne, the next performance came out of the Albert Street Conservatorium on November 25, 1927, from the institution's choir. *The Argus* later reported:

That much good work is being done at the Albert Street Conservatorium was evidenced by the generally high standard which prevailed at the students' concert given last night in the Assembly Hall. The concert was given under the patronage and in the presence of Dame Nellie Melba.... The programme concluded with some part-songs by Gustav Holst rendered by the Conservatorium Ladies' Choir. Miss Ida Scott was a discreet and effective accompanist.¹⁹

Very little was mentioned about the performance, aside from the proficiency of the students' performances.

The final performance of one of Holst's partsongs to be found in the course of this research was given in Perth on September 21, 1940. The preview note claimed that the performance of 'Assemble All Ye Maidens' "will be heard for the first time in Australia and which will be accompanied by a string quintet."²⁰ The review would continue, adopting the tone that might be expected to accompany a premiere performance:

Unusual and varied fare was offered to a large and appreciative audience at the university refectory... when the University Music Society presented a programme of

¹⁹ "Students' Concert," *The Argus*, November 26, 1927, 25.

²⁰ "Camp Comforts Fund," *The West Australian*, September 11, 1940, 9.

music by its members... including the Oriana Ladies' Choir, conducted by Mr. A. J. Leckie.

There was, for instance, what was claimed to be the first Australian performance of Gustav Holst's "Assemble All Ye Maidens" (an elegy on a lady whom grief for the death of her betrothed has killed [sic]). This was introduced to Perth through the initiative of Mr. Leckie and the effective co-operation of his Oriana Choir... Gustav Holst, to quote Mr. Leckie, was an experimentalist in modern music, so something unusual was to be expected (and was received) in this sample of his work. The words were by Robert Bridges.²¹

The honours of the first performance of "Assemble All Ye Maidens" would likely have gone to the Cecilia Choir in Victoria some thirteen years earlier. It is worth noting that in this review, in 1940, we are seeing Holst labelled the 'experimentalist,' yet none of the previous reviews of this work from the mid 1920s onward felt the 'unusual' modern nature enough to comment as such. Perhaps they were right not too, as the harmonic language used in these partsongs do not approach some of the more idiosyncratic compositional language that Holst was renown for in *The Planets* and *The Hymn of Jesus*. One explanation could perhaps stem from the location – Perth – that was likely not producing as much contemporary music as the centres of Melbourne and Sydney. Therefor, the expectation (or lack thereof) of what contemporary music may have held in store - harmonically speaking - may have meant that any choral music that fell outside of the expectations built up from the Germanic choral traditions known to choral societies and their audiences (such as Bach cantatas and commonly performed key works from composers such as Mozart and Brahms) could have been classified as 'unusual.' The structure of *Assemble all ye maidens*, with its mix of lengthy passages of a solo voice over a pedal-accompaniment that emerge into a chorus may also have contributed to the 'unusual' tag the critic labelled the work.

²¹ "An Australian Premiere," *The West Australian*, September 23, 1940, 12.

Six Choral Folk-Songs Op. 39 (1916)

Date	Year	State	Piece	Group	Conductor
November 21	1922	VIC	No. 6	Oriana Madrigal Society	W.C. Frazier
August 3	1926	VIC	No. 2	Oriana Madrigal Society	W.C. Frazier
May 11	1927	NSW	No. 6	Sydney Madrigal Society	Arnold Mote
May 17	1932	VIC	No. 5	Oriana Madrigal Society	W.C. Frazier
July 13	1945	VIC	No. 3	British Music Society	Unspecified

Figure 9.3 – Australian Performances of the Six Choral Folk-Songs Op. 36

With five performances reviewed in Australia of the Six Choral Folk-Songs, W.C. Frazier's Oriana Madrigal Society in Victoria would be responsible for the majority. The first of the Oriana Madrigal Society's three performances and the Australian premiere of one of the Six Choral Folk-Songs was given on November 21, 1922, eliciting the following review:

Anyone who joins a choral society helps materially the cause of music, especially if the society be one which devotes itself more particularly to the higher flights of choralism [sic]. The Oriana Madrigal Society, which gave its second subscription concert in the Assembly Hall last night, evidently belongs to this category, for it has announced that it intends to give special attention to the study and production of madrigals and folk-songs, and its programme last night was evidence that it knows how to proceed. True there was, as a matter of fact, only one actual madrigal, but it was a particularly fine one, in its own way, and its composer, John Wilbye, is the acknowledged prince of English madrigal writers.

There were three folk-song arrangements, two by Vaughan Williams, and one by Gustav Holst, the young English composer, whose setting of the old tune, "Swansea Town," is extremely effective; it was splendidly sung. The two Vaughan Williams

arrangements are decidedly interesting; moreover, they, like the Wilbye madrigal, received last night their first performance in Melbourne.²²

The wording used to describe “Swansea Town” – that it was extremely effective - was commonplace for describing Holst’s music, particularly in the British press where he was always lauded as the ‘clever,’ ‘efficient,’ and ‘effective’ composer.²³ The final paragraph of this review noted that all the works on the program except the Holst were listed as Australian premieres, which may indicate, although this was the first reviewed performance found, that the society had performed it previously. For the moment, this will have to remain speculation as no such evidence could be found. The Oriana Madrigal Society next performed on August 2, this time featuring the song *There Was a Tree*. The review highlighted:

One of the most delightful and intelligent entertainments given in Melbourne for a very long time was the concert which the Oriana Madrigal Society gave last night in the Auditorium in the presence of His Excellency the Governor (Lord Somers) and Lady Somers. The honours were fairly equally shared between Mr. W. C. Frazier, the members of his choir, and Mr. Clive Carey. Mr. Frazier is, of course, a past-master [sic] in the art of choir training and conducting, and his collaborators, the members of the choir, are ever ready to carry out his well-thought-out and wisely balanced plans... The folk song arrangements included “Blow the Wind Southerly” (W. G. Whittaker), “There Was a Tree” (Gustav Holst)... In addition, the choir, with Mr. Clive Carey as soloist, gave Vaughan-William’s [sic] beautiful “Fantasia on a Christmas Carols.” The beauty of this ethereal music was completely realised, and the performance will live long in the memory of those who were fortunate enough to hear it. Melbourne has just cause for praise in Mr. Frazier and his achievements, and great need to accord him full recognition and support...²⁴

²² “Oriana Madrigal Society,” *The Argus*, November 22, 1922, 15.

²³ Reading through the British reviews in Chapter 2 will show the reader the overwhelming use of these several keywords in describing Holst and his music.

²⁴ “Oriana Madrigal Society - A Memorable Concert,” *The Argus*, August 4, 1926, 26.

It is clear that the Oriana Madrigal Society under Frazier were performing contemporary English music in abundance, with Wilbye in their previous concert and Whittaker in this one, and the Holst – Vaughan Williams grouping in both. The critic overlooked Holst's work but lavished praise on Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Christmas Carol*, elaborating that the performance was memorable. It might be presumed that this critic authored some of the British biographical and contemporary historical accounts outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis, with their lavishing of praise and importance on Vaughan Williams and overlooking Holst. Nevertheless, the performance as a whole was given a glowing commendation.

The next performance, of the part-song "Swansea Town" from the Six Choral Folk-Songs was given at the Sydney Conservatorium in May 1927 by their Madrigal Society, conducted by Arnold Mote. The review briefly discussed the Holst work:

Spirited and well-balanced part-singing, attractive in vocal quality and clear in diction, was enjoyed at last night's concert of the Sydney Madrigal Society at the Conservatorium. Mr. Arnold Mote, conductor, led his choir in three representative examples of the classic madrigal form by Orlando Gibbons, Atterbury, and Morley.... A setting by Gustav Holst of a folk-song of the sea, "Swansea Town," in which the sailor chants a farewell to his Nancy in distinctly care-free style, proved refreshing in its breezy rhythm relieved by *bouche fermée* effects to indicate the rising of the tempest...²⁵

There is not much that can be taken from this review about the performance or its reception, but the critic briefly describes the setting of the work, and that it "proved refreshing." If just one of the set were to be selected, "Swansea Town" is clearly the most upbeat and 'catchy' tune, which would be the most likely to be a crowd-pleaser. Following this logic, it may come as no surprise that the first song in the set, "Song of the Blacksmith" is not found in

²⁵ "Madrigal Society," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 12, 1927, 12.

performance in Australia during the scope of the thesis – given that both the harmony and sharp, staccato texture used is much ‘stranger’ than the rest it would have challenged an audience at a choral concert used to more ‘pleasing’ traditional harmony.

The last of the Oriana Madrigal Society’s concerts involving the Six Choral Folk-Songs was given on May 17, 1932, with the review discussing the reception of Holst’s work:

There were moments of definite artistic achievement at the concert given on Tuesday night at the Central Hall... Individual passages in Wilbye’s “Adieu, Sweet Amaryllis,” in Milton’s “Fair Orian” and, particularly, in Gustav Holst’s charming arrangement of the Cornish folk-song, “I Love My Love,” which had to be repeated, were handled with a discreetly unexaggerated attention to detail which produced admirable results... The Oriana Society has a well-deserved reputation for sound and carefully prepared works, but greater resonance, vigour, and spontaneity are needed if the high standard of its performances is to be maintained.²⁶

The critic here highlighted the Holst with the word “particularly,” describing the work as charming and that it had to be repeated such was the audience’s positive reception of the work. Whether the music itself or the subject of the text led the critic to the ‘charming’ label is unknown.

The final performance was of “Matthew, Mark, Luke & John” - the third of the Six Choral Folk-Songs - and was given on July 13, 1945, in the British Music Society’s rooms in Victoria. The critic noted that the concert was “a very happy affair” and that “Byrd’s quaint song, ‘I Thought That Love Had Been a Boy,’ and Gustav Holst’s ‘Mathew [sic], Mark, Luke, and John,’ which I last heard sung in a Cornish village are songs that linger in the memory.”²⁷

²⁶ “Oriana Madrigal Society,” *The Argus*, May 19, 1932, 9.

²⁷ “Madrigals and Part Songs,” *The Argus*, July 14, 1945, 12.

This is an upbeat and entirely positive review, and the connection the critic had with the work, having heard it performed in England, must have served to strengthen the lingering of Holst's song in his memory.

Six Baritone Songs Op. 15 (1903)

Date	Year	State	Group	Conductor
July 20	1938	WA	Metropolitan Gleemen	Unspecified
April 24	1954	NSW	Quartette Club	Arthur Bevan

Figure 9.4 – Australian Performances of the Six Baritones Songs Op. 15

The “Sergeant’s Song” from Holst’s Six Baritone Songs (Op. 15, no 3) received two performances in Australia, both after Holst’s death.

The first performance was in a Metropolitan Gleeman concert in Perth on July 20, 1938. No review was found for this concert, however two preview notes revealed the venue was the Anzac House, and the programme contained other British works such as “She Walks in Beauty” by Bantock and “The Turtle Dove” by Vaughan Williams,²⁸ indicating the Holst work was being heard in the context of other contemporary British music.

²⁸ “Music and Theatre,” *The West Australian*, July 16, 1938, 8.

“Metropolitan Gleemen’s Concert,” *The West Australian*, July 20, 1938, 9.

The last performance found was in a concert outside of the scope covered in this thesis, on April 27, 1954. A “lively performance was given of the ‘Sergant’s Song’ [sic] (Gustav Holst),” in a concert by the Quartette Club under Arthur Bevan in New South Wales, where “the visiting guest artist was bass-baritone Noel Melvin,²⁹ who as well as being gifted with a rich, resonant and powerful voice of quality, has a captivating stage personality.”³⁰ No further detail was given about Holst’s song or its reception, but there was a “large audience” in attendance at the Broken Hill Town Hall. Other items on the programme were Coleridge Taylor’s “Drake’s Drum,” Frederick Norton’s “The Camel and The Butterfly,” and “The Tide Rises and the Tide Falls” by Adam Carse. Why only the “Sergeant’s Song” was performed from the set of six of Holst’s partsongs is unknown.

The Heart Worships (Song: 1907)

Date	Year	State	Singer
December 4	1923	VIC	Veronica Mansfield
May 1	1926	NSW	Lillian Gibson
May 28	1932	QLD	Jessie Smith
August 7	1937	QLD	Gwenda Davies
April 21	1939	NSW	Heather Kinnaird

Figure 9.5 – Australian Performances of *The Heart Worships*

²⁹ Noel Melvin (1924-2003) born in Sydney, and won the vocal section of the A.B.C. vocal and concerto competition in 1947, going on to perform with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Joseph Post, another great exponent of Holst’s music in Australia. “Musical passion enhanced lives of those less fortunate,” <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/05/07/1052280321184.html> (accessed May 13, 2014).

³⁰ “Delightful Concert by Quartette Club,” *Barrier Miner*, April 27, 1954, 12.

Holst's song *The Heart Worships* received five performances between 1900 and 1950, evenly spread across the 1920s and 1930s, by five different singers in three different states. In Melbourne, the soprano Veronica Mansfield gave the first performance on December 4, 1923, as part of a concert by Albert Street Conservatorium students. The critic described that:

Good voices, and fine poetry set to equally fine music, were remarkably plentiful at the concert given last night in the Assembly Hall by students of the Albert Street Conservatorium. Miss Veronica Mansfield sung an exceedingly beautiful song, "The Heart Worships," by Gustav Holst, with much beauty of tone and with complete understanding: she was ably seconded by Miss Ida Scott, whose accompanying, both in this particular item and elsewhere was a delight.³¹

The language used by the critic was positive, *The Heart Worships* described as an "exceedingly beautiful song." That the critic singled out only this work for discussion is telling in that the Holst was clearly a highlight of the concert.³²

Three years later in 1926, *The Heart Worships* was performed in a vocal recital by Lillian Gibson in Sydney. The performance took place in the Sydney Town Hall on May 1, 1926. The review of the recital followed:

An enthusiastic welcome was accorded to Madame Lillian Gibson on Saturday night, when she appeared at the Town Hall... Madame Gibson had gained greatly in confidence and production during the two or three years she has spent in England. Her contralto is even and full over its whole range, and is used without apparent effort. On Saturday night it lacked variety, however such songs as "The Lament of Isis," by Granville Bantock, "The Heart Worships," by Gustav von Holst, and Hugo Wolf's

³¹ "Conservatorium Students," *The Argus*, December 5, 1923, 24.

³² As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Imogen Holst's point that many of the smaller choral and vocal works were not recorded before 1950 and that until around the same time it was difficult to obtain a score for many of these works.

“Secrecy” were given with taste and a certain amount of expression: but the same tone-quality persisted through them all...³³

No mention of the reception of any of the works is made, but the review was quite negative, going on to criticize the vocal technique produced that evening, and breathing in the middle of words in Italian songs. The composer’s name stands out immediately – Gustav von Holst – as in 1926, at the height of his international fame following the success of *The Planets*, this mistake can only be marked up to a two-fold lack of connection with Holst. Firstly, Lillian Gibson may have noted the name (von Holst) from the score (being published in 1907 with the von Holst name). Secondly, the critic may have been unaware of Holst (which surely would have been unlikely) – or rather, simply too lazy to change what was on a programme in the review – which may be the more likely scenario. Either way, that Holst was reported, as Von Holst in the mid-1920s is a conspicuous oversight.

There was a note of a competition award in 1929 in Brisbane, which merely stated, “the winner of the Contralto Solo section was D. Woodcock, singing ‘The Heart Worships.’”³⁴

Some six years later, “The Commonwealth of Nations” concert at the Ann Street Church in Melbourne included the next performance. The announcement preview was the only evidence found about this performance, where Jessie Smith was to sing “The Heart Worships” with the organist Archie Day accompanying. The programme, shared with other singers, included other British works such as the “Easter Hymn” arranged by Bridge and Handel’s “Come unto Him.”³⁵

³³ “Madame Gibson’s Recital,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 3, 1926, 5.

³⁴ *The Brisbane Courier*, October 7, 1929, 20.

³⁵ “Church Services and Announcements,” *The Brisbane Courier*, May 28, 1932, 3.

Another church performance of the work occurred at the Albert Street Methodist Church, with the soloist Gwenda Davies, and interestingly the same accompanist, Archie Day on the organ (although there was no mention that he was an accompanist to the soloists).³⁶

The last performance discovered before 1950 was given in Sydney, in a recital by Raymond Beatty and Heather Kinnaird on April 22, 1939. Beatty gave three songs by Vaughan Williams (set to words by Robert Louis Stevenson) before Kinnaird performed *Sleep* by Hubert Parry and Holst's *The Heart Worships*, both “were sung with clear tone and warmth of expression.”³⁷ No mention of the audience reception was recorded.

In The Bleak Mid Winter (C1906)

Date	Year	State	Group	Conductor
December 10	1935	VIC	Church of England Grammar	Unspecified
December 27	1936	VIC	St. Paul's Cathedral Choir	A.E. Floyd
May 2	1937	VIC	Church of England Grammar	Unspecified
December 7	1951	QLD	Unspecified	Unspecified

Figure 9.6 – Australian Performances of *In The Bleak Mid Winter*

Holst's famous carol setting of *In The Bleak Mid Winter* appeared in the English Hymnal in 1906 – collated and edited by Ralph Vaughan Williams.³⁸ It was also used in the 1928

³⁶ “Church Services and Announcements,” *The Courier-Mail*, August 7, 1937, 3.

³⁷ “Recital of British Music,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 22, 1939, 19.

³⁸ Ralph Vaughan Williams Ed., *The English Hymnal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1906).

Oxford Book of Carols, which may have been significant in the popularization of Holst's setting.³⁹

There were only four recorded reviews of *In The Bleak Mid Winter* uncovered for the period of this study - The first, from the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School's Carols evening on December 10, 1935. The review merely mentioned the list of works sung.⁴⁰ The following year, *In the Bleak Mid Winter* was sung at St. Paul's Cathedral by the choir directed by A.E. Floyd. The attendance was noted as large, and "Holst's fine arrangements of another Rossetti carol, 'In the Bleak Midwinter' [sic] in which a modern poem is invested with a deliberately archaic atmosphere."⁴¹ Given the material (a carol setting), it is no wonder the critic chose to analyse the archaic atmosphere as deliberate. This was certainly no dig at Holst's skill or imagination, rather explanatory perhaps as to why this sounds nothing like the "Holst" the majority of the public most likely knew from *The Planets*. The Church of England Grammar School's choir sang *In the Bleak Mid Winter* again on May 2, 1937,⁴² and lastly Holst's "exquisite setting" was given at a carol service in Brisbane on December 7, 1951.⁴³ There were no details volunteered about these performances past the listing of the works.

Holst's *In The Bleak Mid Winter* having been included in the 1906 English Hymnal would suggest that the work was most probably widely known and performed in schools and church services, however few reviewed performances could be uncovered in Australia or Britain, which must be expected as church services and carols were not the fare for a critical review.⁴⁴

³⁹ Percy Dearmer, Martin Shaw and Ralph Vaughan Williams, *The Oxford Book of Carols* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).

⁴⁰ "Carols at Melbourne Grammar," *The Argus*, December 11, 1935, 21.

⁴¹ "Christmas Carol Service," *The Argus*, December 28, 1936, 6.

⁴² "Choral and Organ Recital," *Camperdown Chronicle*, May 4, 1937, 2.

⁴³ "Packed Audience at Fine Carol Concert," *The Courier-Mail*, December 8, 1951, 5.

⁴⁴ The reader should assume that the carol settings of Holst, as well as other music used in religious services (such as the Psalm Settings discussed later in the chapter) were performed much more

Hymns from the Rig Veda Op 24 and Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda

Date	Year	State	Singer	Conductor
November 30	1929	VIC	Mixed Choirs	Herbert Davis
December 5	1933	VIC	Isabel Biddell	Recital
August 17	1935	VIC	Murial Brunskill	Recital
November 6	1947	VIC	Combined School Choirs	John Bishop

Figure 9.7 – Australian Performances of *Hymns from the Rig Veda Op 24 and Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*

The Orpheon Choristers under Herbert Davis performed the Choral Hymns from the *Rig Veda*, according to a preview in Victoria in 1929.⁴⁵ No review of the concert was found in the research for this study to confirm this performance or its reception.

In the 1930s, two performances of the Hymns from the *Rig Veda* Op 24 were found – these being the set with piano accompaniment. The first, in December 1933 was given as part of an Oriana Madrigal Society concert, where the contralto Isabel Biddell sang “Stormclouds” (Also known as “Maruts”), the third solo song from the set, where the critic merely noted that “her rendering... was especially dramatic.”⁴⁶ Murial Brunskill performed “Varuna” (whether this was Varuna I or II or both is unknown) in a recital in Melbourne on August 17, 1935.

frequently than these reviews would indicate. Such performances were unlikely to be reviewed or reported on.

⁴⁵ “Orpheon Choristers,” *The Argus*, November 25, 1929, 10.

⁴⁶ “Christmas Carols,” *The Argus*, December 6, 1933, 16.

There were only vague comments given in the review of her recital, with no detail as to the individual works or their reception by the audience.⁴⁷

The final performance found within the scope of this thesis is of Holst's *Funeral Hymn* from the *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* Op. 26 no. 1 in November 1947. The reviewer offered:

A moving performance of Gustav Holst's Funeral Hymn was among the features of the concert by the Junior Symphony Orchestra and Combined Schools' Choir, under John Bishop, at the Town Hall last night.

The Hymn, which is taken from the Rig Veda, concluded with a climax of glorious choral polyphony and excellent orchestral accompaniment. The recitative work of the tenors and basses, followed by that of the sopranos and contraltos in "O Woman, Thou Whose Eyes With Years are Dim" was most effective.⁴⁸

The critic's favourable feelings were represented with the strong phrase describing Holst's music. The ensembles and orchestra were clearly effective in communicating Holst's musical intent in the Sanskrit "Funeral Hymn." The choral polyphony that Holst incorporated towards the end of the funeral Hymn was clearly effective to the critic and audience, perhaps more so as here it is wedged between two monophonic sections that are much more adherent to a consistent harmonic rhythm.

⁴⁷ "Miss Murial Brunskill," *The Argus*, August 19, 1935, 7.

⁴⁸ "Fine Junior Orchestral Concert Given," *The Argus*, November 7, 1947, 6.

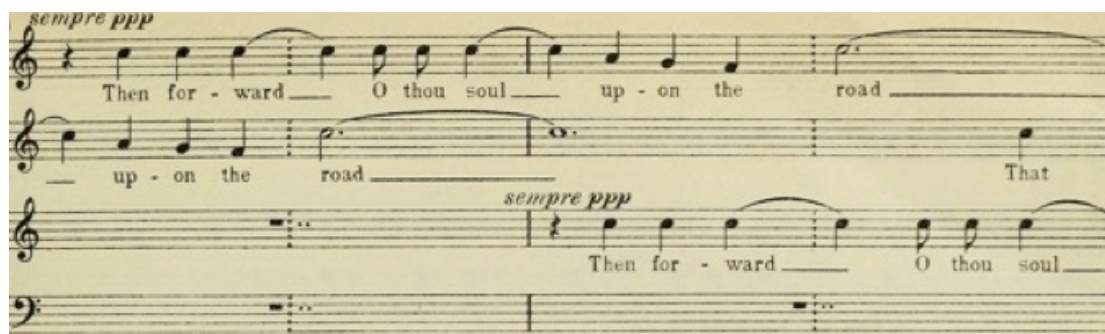


Figure 9.8 – An example of Holst’s use of choral polyphony in “A Funeral Hymn”⁴⁹

Three Festival Choruses, With Orchestra (1916)

Date	Year	State	Group	Conductor
November 24	1923	VIC	Oriana Madrigal Society	W.C. Frazier
September 26	1925	QLD	Lena Hammond's Choir	Lena Hammond
December 15	1951	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davies

Figure 9.9 – Australian Performances of the Three Festival Choruses

The Oriana Madrigal Society, directed by W.C. Frazier, gave the first of the three performances of works from the Three Festival Choruses in Melbourne in 1923 (in conjunction with the Castlemaine Choral Society, and the Bendigo Choral Society). “Turn Back, O Man” – the second of the three works – was reviewed several days after the performance:

If interest in choral music is a sure sign of health in the musical life of a community, then cause for satisfaction may well be found in the very large audience which assembled in the Melbourne Town Hall on Saturday evening. For the great attraction

⁴⁹ Excerpt taken from public domain score. Gustav Holst, *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda : First Group* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1911).

was not the singing of Madame This or Signor That, but the performance of some first-rate choral music by a combination of three choirs, all of which have the advantage of the inspiring guidance of Mr. W. C. Frazier...

The combined choirs gave two further items, a rather remarkable "Sanctus" by A. L. Gunning, and a curious setting by Gustav Holst, of a lovely old tune from the Genevan Psalter of 1551. The choirs did full justice to both.⁵⁰

The setting of the tune from the Genevan Psalter of 1551 was Holst's "Turn Back, O Man" from the Three Festival Choruses composed in 1916. The tune was set to words by Clifford Bax, provided at the request of Holst and later appeared in the League of Arts' *Motherland Song Book* in 1919.⁵¹

Lena Hammond's Choir performed the first of the Three Festival Choruses – "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" - on September 26, 1925 at the Albert Hall in Brisbane. No previews appeared, but the review was published on September 28:

An interesting concert was given at the Albert Hall on Saturday night by Miss Lena Hammond's choir and four of her advanced students.... There were many signs that great care had been taken with the training of all the singers, and that they approached their work with carefulness and enthusiasm.... The mixed choir sang "Wisdom and Folly" from "The Rebel Maid," and brought the concert to a close with "O Lily, Lady of Loveliness" and an old French Melody, "Let all mortal flesh keep silence," arranged by Gustav Holst.⁵²

It is certain that this performance must have been given with either a piano or organ reduction accompaniment, as "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" was written with orchestral

⁵⁰ "Oriana Madrigal Society," *The Argus*, November 26, 1923, 14.

⁵¹ *The Motherland Song Book. vol. I for unison and mixed voices*. London: Stainer & Bell, 1919.

⁵² "Choral and Song Recital," *The Brisbane Courier*, September 28, 1925, 9.

accompaniment, which was not mentioned in the review, and thus is highly unlikely to have been rendered in its original guise, which would surely have been noted by the critic. The critic also noted that the work is “an old French Melody,” but neglected to delve further that the text is taken from a translation of a Greek hymn.⁵³ The very common practice of neglecting to note the audience reaction to the programme occurred once more.

The last reviewed performance of the Three Festival Choruses was found just outside the end of the scope of this thesis, on December 15, 1951. Herbert Davis, conducting the Malvern and Box Hill Choral Societies and the Zelman Symphony Orchestra combined in a full realisation of “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,” reviewed in *The Argus* the following Monday:

Accustomed to a concert hall style of carol singing, the audience was at first startled, and later enraptured by Mr. Velde’s gay, spontaneous treatment of “From Heaven Above” and “The Noble Stem of Jesse.”... and the programme closed on a note of exultant climax with Gustav Holst’s arrangement for soloists, chorus, orchestra, and organ of the Greek hymn “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent.”⁵⁴

Notwithstanding the critic’s error in the title of Holst’s work, with “silent” instead of “silence”, the way in which it might provide the “exultant climax” of the programme is further explained by Imogen Holst with her analysis that “the canon [in *Let All Mortal Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*] flows through the orchestra like an outpouring of endless Alleluias.”⁵⁵ These works were spared from any detailed coverage in the reviews above, which may be indicative of the indifference afforded to them by the critic or community. It may also have been that these performances just happened to be reviewed by a critic that did not elaborate on any work in depth, rather just reporting the general repertoire performed and

⁵³ The text is a well known hymn, so its Greek origin would not have necessarily been of note.

⁵⁴ “Enchanting Carol Beautifully Sung,” *The Argus*, December 17, 1951, 2.

⁵⁵ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 56.

the execution of the performers. The three reviews all use positive language in the brief mentioning of Holst's works, but any further analysis would be speculation.

Twelve Songs Op. 48 (1929 - Words by Humbert Wolfe)

Date	Year	State	Singer
September 14	1933	QLD	Stuart Wilson
August 15	1939	NSW	Ruth Pearce-Jones (Soprano)
April 24	1947	NSW	Ruth Pearce-Jones (Soprano)

Figure 9.10 – Australian Performances of Twelve Songs Op. 48

The Twelve Songs Op. 48 were composed in 1929, and first appeared in Australia via a broadcast recital by the English tenor Stuart Wilson over 4QG in Queensland on September 14, 1933. Wilson sang "Journey's End," which was presented alongside works by Vaughan Williams, Clive Carey, Denis Brown and the Australian, Linda Phillips.⁵⁶

The remaining two performances found within the scope of this thesis came in recitals given by the Sydney soprano Ruth Pearce-Jones. The first of these was in August 1939, where a preview notice stated that Pearce-Jones would sing "two unfamiliar songs by Gustav Holst: namely; 'A Little Music,' and 'The Floral Bandit.'"⁵⁷ Clearly these songs were new to the Sydney critic (and therefore it could be assumed, the audience). No review of the recital was found, and it would be another 8 years before her next reported performance of the work where the critic reported "three songs by Gustav Holst on poems by Humbert Wolfe, written

⁵⁶ "Modern Songs – Mr. Wilson's Recital," *The Courier-Mail*, September 15, 1933, 14.

⁵⁷ "Various Musical Events," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 12, 1939, 12.

in a strongly individual style, left the audience gasping with their abrupt endings.”⁵⁸ Given the tone of the rest of this review (not to mention the title it fell under – “Singing Lacked Warmth”), this gasping from the audience may be taken either as a positive (that they were hanging on every phrase) or in the negative (where the ‘abrupt endings’ were not received well musically).

Two Psalms (1912)

Date	Year	State	Singer	Conductor
August 8	1925	QLD	Austral Choir	E.R.B. Jordan
November 13	1926	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davis
December 1	1926	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davis
August 20	1927	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davis
August 31	1929	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davis
October 6	1929	WA	Ladies Odeon Choir	Unspecified
August 26	1933	NSW	Test Work	Unspecified
August 1	1936	QLD	State and Municipal Choir	E.R.B. Jordan
June 30	1937	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium Choir	Edgar Bainton
August 17	1937	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davis
April 27	1939	NSW	A.B.C. Orchestra	Edgar Bainton
October 19	1940	VIC	Malvern Choral Society	Herbert Davis

Figure 9.11 – Australian Performances of Holst’s Two Psalms

That there were champions of Holst’s music in Australia has been evident throughout most chapters of this thesis, and looking at the performance chart for the Two Psalms above is confirmation. The eleven ‘proper’ performances of the Two Psalms (excluding the test work)

⁵⁸ Some of the Twelve Songs contain short, sharp, and texturally thin accompaniment – such as the first of the set, “A Little Music.” These songs are certainly on the more idiosyncratically ‘Holst’ end of the spectrum of his output, so the “strong individual style” comment from the critic is quite understandable here. “Singing Lacked Warmth,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 25, 1947, 8.

are entirely accounted for by three very familiar conductors – Jordan, Davis, and Bainton. Herbert Davis alone was responsible for more than half of the performances spanning fifteen years.

The Austral Choir under E. R. B. Jordan gave the premiere performance of both psalms in Brisbane. The performance was on August 8, 1925, with its review noting that the Holst psalms had not been heard in Australia before:

Mr. Arthur Jordan had recovered from his slight indisposition from which he suffered at the first concert, and gave his best on Saturday night at the second of the Austral Choir's all-British concerts in the Exhibition Hall... The work of the choir, under the baton of Mr. E. R. B. Jordan... for the first time in Queensland, (sung) two extremely difficult "Psalms," by Gustav Holst.⁵⁹

As we have seen, critics often noted the technical difficulty of Holst's works, this being no exception. The next performance would receive a review that is rare for Holst - a detailed discussion on the Psalms themselves *and* the audience response to them. The concert in question was given by the Malvern Choral Society on November 13, 1926, and was the first of six performances of the Two Psalms given under the auspices of Herbert Davis by this ensemble. The glowing review stated:

Under the enlightened direction of Mr. Herbert Davis, and with very efficient organisation, the Malvern Choral Society is doing work of real value and of much distinction. It was all to the good that, as the Malvern Town Hall is not at present available, this enterprising suburban society was impelled to invade the city, and the great success of the concert given on Saturday evening, in the Assembly Hall, may well dispose the committee to repeat the process. The hall, including the gallery, was filled with a deeply attentive and highly appreciative audience.

⁵⁹ "All British – Second Austral Choir Concert," *The Brisbane Courier*, August 10, 1925, 9.

The programme at this fifth concert (the society is still in its youth) exemplified Mr. Davis's admirable policy of mingling new things with others comparatively familiar. No fewer than four of the choral items received on this occasion their first performance in Melbourne. Other novelties were... two splendid psalm-settings by Gustav Holst.... Both the Holst "Psalms" were highly impressive. "Psalm 86" is based on the noble melody to which this particular psalm is set in the Genevan Psalter of 1543. It calls for a chorus of mixed voices, two vocal soloists, and an accompaniment of strings and organ. It is a fine piece of work, inspiring and impressive, and it was, on this occasion, admirably rendered. It says much for the taste and discernment of the audience that, though the work is entirely free from cheap and ad captandum effects, there was an insistent demand for an immediate repetition, a demand to which Mr. Davis and his willing and able colleagues acceded... There is more real religious feeling, and more musical value in this "psalm-setting" than in many a long-winded and pretentious "oratorio."⁶⁰

The critic used strong and complimentary language to describe the Psalms – using descriptors as 'splendid,' 'highly impressive,' and 'inspiring.' The audience is given a pat on the back in the review, with their taste and discernment applauded for demanding an immediate repetition of the Holst works. Finally, the parting comment about there being more religious and musical feeling in Holst's work than in many oratorios highlighted the high regard in which these new Psalms were being held.

Davis and the Malvern Choral Society would perform the Two Psalms again a few weeks later, in a concert on December 1, 1926. There is every indication from the language, style, and familiarity of the critic with the ensemble, that it was the same reviewer as the previous concert (not at all unusual for the same newspaper):

⁶⁰ "Malvern Choral Society," *The Argus*, November 15, 1926, 14.

For its last concert of the present season, the Musical Society of Victoria succeeded in drawing up a programme of unusual interest. It was all to the good that the announced title, “chamber concert,” proved to be inaccurate, for that brought this about was the very welcome inclusion of some first-rate choral works. When only a few weeks ago the Malvern Choral Society, under Mr. Herbert Davis, gave the first Melbourne performance of two splendid psalm-settings by Gustav Holst, it was widely felt that an early repetition of these compositions would be acceptable. The society did well to arrange for this, and also for the performance, by the same well-trained body, of two of Parry’s impressive and beautiful “Songs of Farewell.”⁶¹

Whether or not the Two Psalms had already been earmarked for another performance before they were revealed to the Melbourne audience for the first time in their last concert is unknown, but this certainly seems to be a case of the works being such a success in the first concert (demanding an immediate repetition after their conclusion) that they are quickly included in the next programme. The critic made note of the concert several weeks prior, and that Davis and the society “did well” arranging this follow-up performance.

The third performance by Davis’s Malvern Choral Society of the Two Psalms is given on the August 20, 1927. Two previews are found on August 15 and 20, in the lead up to the performance. There appears to be some confusion on the part of the author of the previews, as the earlier preview stated “The numbers to be sung will include two psalms by Gustave Holst [sic], with string and harp accompaniment,”⁶² and the latter correctly stated that “the programme will include two psalms, with strings and organ (Holst).”⁶³ The venue is also mentioned as the new Malvern Town Hall (a previous review mentioned that the society “invaded the city” while the construction was underway). The review came several days later:

⁶¹ “Musical Society,” *The Argus*, December 2, 1926, 12.

⁶² “Malvern Choral Society,” *The Argus*, August 15, 1927, 18.

⁶³ “Malvern Choral Society,” *The Argus*, August 20, 1927, 36.

There was a large audience at the Malvern Town Hall on Saturday night, when the Malvern Choral Society held its seventh concert. Dame Nellie Melba was present. Conducted by Mr. Herbert Davis, the choral numbers were finely sung by the choir of the society. One of the most pleasing numbers of the evening, with a flute and harp accompaniment, was the Faery chorus from Boughton's opera "The Immortal Hour." A musical setting of Psalm 86, with strings and organ accompaniment, showed the choir at its strongest.⁶⁴

The confusion in the previews regarding the harp accompaniment is explained in the review – it was Boughton's opera that incorporated it, not the Holst works. The society seems to have dropped "Psalm 148" for this performance, with specific mention of "Psalm 86" having represented the best of the choir.

An important review appears after the next Victorian performance by the Malvern Choral Society on August 31, 1929:

In the comparatively short period which has elapsed since its inception, the Malvern Choral Society under the able direction of Mr. Herbert Davis has gained a thoroughly well-earned reputation for excellent and closely studied work. Its programmes have done admirable service in introducing new compositions by British musicians. The fact that the choral works of such representative contemporary writers as Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Rutland Boughton are happily familiar to Melbourne music-lovers is in a very considerable degree due to the society's initiative and enthusiasm. The programme presented at its last concert, given in the Malvern Town Hall on Saturday evening, in no way fell below previous standards. Two important works by Vaughan Williams, the "Five Mystical Songs" – which received on this occasion the first full performance in Australia – and "Toward the Unknown Region,"

⁶⁴ "Malvern Choral Society," *The Argus*, August 22, 1927, 18.

were included in the second part of the concert, while earlier items comprised Holst's rather self-consciously archaic arrangements of the 86th and 148th Psalms and two additional "first performances" in Boughton's "Celtic Lullaby" and "Sea Rune."...⁶⁵

The critic's reflection that these British works were 'happily familiar' is an important point to consider when there is a wider perspective of the performances of a particular contemporary composer or group of composers. The critic has effectively stated that the Victorian audiences would not know these works if not for this particular ensemble and conductor. Davis and the Malvern Choral Society were doing important work in providing a platform for contemporary British choral composers to be heard repeatedly in Australia – and in their case, very successfully.

The next performance was given in a concert by three Western Australian choirs, two of which were already responsible for previous performances of Holst in that state: The Ladies Odeon Society, and the Metropolitan Gleeman. The performance of "Psalm 148" was given on October 6, 1929, with a preview discussing the work:

Tomorrow afternoon music-lovers will flock to Hoyts Regent Theatre, one hopes, in their many hundreds. For the Centenary concert then to be given the collaboration of the city's three leading musical societies has made possible a programme of exceptional importance and interest to all who take the art seriously. Apart from the annual "Messiah" performances, the conjunction of mixed choir and orchestra in works of major significance is an event almost as rare in Perth as Centenary celebrations. That fact alone should ensure a great audience...

As an expression of corporate thanksgiving Gustav Holst's setting on the 148th Psalm, for chorus, strings and organ, has obvious fitness for this time and the particular occasion. Holst (who is in the van of living English composers) has used here a noble

⁶⁵ "Malvern Choral Society – First Performances," *The Argus*, September 2, 1929, 12.

and sturdy old chorale tune, and has built with it a musical structure of directness and strength...⁶⁶

Strangely for a concert of such apparent importance, no review could be uncovered. This was to be the final performance of the 1920s for which a review was found.

The 148th Psalm was used as a test work in the Sydney Interstate Choral Championships in August 1933, alongside Alfred Hill's *To Music* and Granville Bantock's *The Leprechaun*. There was no extra information about the works volunteered aside from generic comments on the different choirs that competed all being of a high standard.⁶⁷

The Two Psalms were next presented by E.R.B. Jordan with the State and Municipal Choir in Queensland "to an audience that filled the Albert Hall" on August 1, 1936. Jordan had premiered the Two Psalms in Australia in 1925 with the Austral Choir, so had clearly brought the work with him. The critic noted that "there was impressive singing of an excerpt from Holst's 'Two Psalms,'" but delved in to no further detail.⁶⁸

The New South Wales Conservatorium of Music hosted a performance of the Two Psalms in a concert by the Conservatorium Orchestra and Choir on June 30, 1937. The review was quite detailed:

There were two choral works of especial beauty in last night's programme... they were Brahms Requiem, which, according to the Conservatorium records, was last played in 1934, and Gustav Holst's Two Psalms, which had not before been heard in Sydney.

⁶⁶ "Centenary Concert," *The West Australian*, October 5, 1929, 9.

⁶⁷ "Audiences' Enthusiasm – High Choral Standard," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 28, 1933, 6.

⁶⁸ "Choral Groups Give Recital," *The Courier-Mail*, August 3, 1936, 21.

The psalms which Holst had chosen to set to music were the eighty-sixth and the hundred and forty-eighth. The orchestral opening of the former, with its strong theme allotted to the ‘cellos, at once established the style of dignified yet poignant simplicity which was to rule throughout... Expressive solos in the same manner were allotted to Mr. Fred Foxley (tenor) and Miss Lorna McKean (soprano).

The second psalm made a marked contrast with the first. Here, instead of sparse, austere harmonies, there was an opulent development of the vocal parts, whose gaiety sometimes suggested the Elizabethan composers. The ascending and descending scale passages were particularly delicate and charming.

Dr. Edgar Bainton, as conductor, had obviously given the psalms a good deal of preparation...⁶⁹

This critic notes Holst’s Psalms as not having been heard in Sydney previously, however, there was mention of them used as a test work in the Sydney Interstate Choral Championships in August 1933. Lorna McKean is a familiar name in relation to Holst concerts in Australia, and she would be responsible for four performances of the Four Songs Voice and Violin in Western Australian in the 1940s. The Two Psalms are discussed positively in the review, with the language hinting always towards the “delicate and charming” aspect of the works.

Several months later in Victoria in a combined choirs concert involving the Malvern Choral Society and Zelman Memorial Orchestra, the 86th psalm was performed at the Melbourne Town Hall. The review detailed:

Much excellent singing was heard last night at the Town Hall... The concert was directed by Mr. Herbert Davis, and both the conductor and the city organist (Mr. William McKie)... were received with enthusiasm by a large audience.

⁶⁹ “Two Choral Works – Psalms by Gustav Holst,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 1, 1937, 9.

The combined choirs gave of their best is Gustav Holst's compelling setting of Psalm LXXXVI [86]. The blending of tone was singularly exact, and the rhythmical attack was decisive... both choir and orchestra achieved brilliance of colour in the dynamic finale.⁷⁰

By this time in the late 1930s, Melbourne audiences were quite familiar with Holst's Psalms due the run of performances afforded to them by Herbert Davis. "Psalm 86" was here described as compelling, and (as usual for Davis and the Malvern Choral Society) the ensembles performed admirably.

A concert featuring the A.B.C. Orchestra in Sydney under Dr. Edgar Bainton performed Holst's setting of "Psalm 148" on April 27, 1939. The critic noted, "Gustav Holst's arresting arrangement for the Psalm "Lord, Who hast made us for Thine own" supplied a further opportunity for the choir to show its mettle." The concert was on a larger scale than usual, as it was noted that there was a massed choir of 400 voices that Bainton dealt with expertly.⁷¹ No other details as to the reception of the performance were given.

The last performance found in the research for this thesis was in a concert on October 19, 1940, once more given by the Malvern Choral Society and the Zelman Memorial Orchestra under Herbert Davis. The critic Cyril Jenkins noted that the Holst Psalms were set alongside the first part of Haydn's creation and Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystic Songs*, which were discussed in detail and held up as "the gem of the programme."⁷² The Holst psalm were not discussed further, nor was there any note of the audience size or reaction to any works on the programme.

⁷⁰ "Good Choral Singing," *The Argus*, August 18, 1937, 7.

⁷¹ "Music Clubs' Concert – Choirs and Orchestra," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 28, 1939, 3.

⁷² Cyril Jenkins, "Mystical Songs," *The Argus*, October 21, 1940, 5.

The Two Psalms of Holst received a larger number of performances than many of the composer's other works in Australia. The work of Herbert Davis and his Malvern Choral Society played a major role in familiarising the Australian public with the work, which received almost universal admiration and popularity with the audiences who heard it.

A Dirge for Two Veterans (1914)

Date	Year	State	Singer	Conductor
October 28	1925	WA	Metropolitan Gleemen	A.J. Leckie
November 3	1926	WA	Metropolitan Gleemen	A.J. Leckie

Figure 9.12 – Australian Performances of *A Dirge for Two Veterans*

Holst's *A Dirge for Two Veterans* received only two performances in Australia between 1900 and 1950, both given by the Metropolitan Gleemen in Western Australia and conducted by A.J. Leckie in the mid 1920s. The first performance occurred on October 28, 1925, with a preview for the concert appearing in the local newspaper on October 24, outlining the programme:

Metropolitan Gleemen: Concert in Queen's Hall, Wednesday, October 28th.

Programme to include Holst's "Dirge for Two Veterans," and part songs, by Cyril Rootham, Vaughan Williams, Dunhill, etc. Assisting artists: Miss Gertrude Ash, Mr. Robert Buchanan and the Mace String Quartette [sic].⁷³

⁷³ "Music – Forthcoming Events," *The West Australian*, October 24, 1925, 15.

The reviews followed on October 29, and unusually, compared to so many other performances in Australia, there were different accounts in two different papers. The first makes special mention of the attendance at the concert:

The popularity of the Metropolitan Gleemen was clearly attested last night, when a large audience filled Queen's Hall to hear the 67th concert presented by them. Under the skilled direction of Mr. A. J. Leckie, Mus. Bac., the singers gave an interesting programme, the principal feature of which was Gustav Holst's setting of Walt Whitman's impressive poem "A Dirge for Two Veterans." This remarkable work, which had not previously been performed in Perth, was rendered by the Gleemen in praiseworthy style, while several members of the R.S.L. Band provided a very effective accompaniment of brass and drums. The poem is a descriptive word-picture of the funeral obsequies of two veteran soldiers, father and son; "in the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell... and the double grave awaits them." In the earlier part of the composition the singing is unaccompanied; then the "sound of coming full-keyed bugles.... The great drums pounding, and the small drums steadily whirring," is graphically illustrated by instrumental accompaniment... Prolonged applause followed the conclusion of the notable achievement, and a repetition of the work was granted.⁷⁴

This thoughtful review captured both the scene and the reaction superbly, and passed comment on specifics in the work that resonated with the audience, prompting prolonged applause and a repetition of the work. That the piece drew both "prolonged applause" and a repetition straight after showed that the work was very well received by the Perth audience. The second review would mirror the first, albeit with a more poetic approach:

"Composers! Mighty maestros!" wrote Walt Whitman in one of his extraordinary poems... The forceful, sometimes jangled songs of Whitman do not seem as a rule, the sort of poetry to impel a maestro, mighty or otherwise, to attempt musical setting.

⁷⁴ "Metropolitan Gleemen," *The Daily News*, October 29, 1925, 3.

There are, of course, exceptions. Frederick Delius has made an elaborate choral work on the text of “Sea Drift.” “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors” has been set more than once, also “Captain, my Captain.” And last night in Queen’s Hall the Metropolitan Gleemen gave the first performance here of Gustav Holst’s setting of “A Dirge for Two Veterans.” This noble poem belongs to the fine series, inspired by the Civil War, which its author called “Drum Taps.” Holst’s music is for male voices, with accompaniment of brass and drums. Members of the R.S.L. Band co-operated with the Gleemen, the instruments used being three cornets, trombone, tuba, bass drum, and side drum. The choral writing is not elaborate, but though there are on occasions no more than two vocal parts, the composer requires his interpreters to negotiate some awkward intervals and uncommon key changes. And the accompaniment is rarely a help, and at moments a distinct hindrance to the singers... The earlier part of Holst’s work is for unaccompanied voices. Later the poet’s description of the “sad procession” and the funeral music of the bugles and drums is reflected in the sombre march-time of the instrumental accompaniment. A climax is reached with the words “The strong dead-march enwraps me,” and the music then returns to quietude. A little readily pardonable uncertainty in regard to intonation notwithstanding, the performance of this remarkable work under Mr. A. J. Leckie’s guidance reflected considerable credit on the participants. The audience acknowledged the enterprise and the achievement handsomely, and the composition was given again in its entirety.⁷⁵

This review finished with the acknowledgment that “The audience was very large.” The appreciation the audience gave to Holst’s work led to its repetition – clearly this work resonated with the Perth audience in attendance. It was not only the audience, however, that were admirers of Holst’s setting of *A Dirge for Two Veterans*. The performance prompted the critic “Fidelio” to expound in another article several days later with views of Whitman and music:

⁷⁵ “Metropolitan Gleemen,” *The West Australian*, October 29, 1925, 12.

After listening, the other night, to Holst's setting of "A Dirge for Two Veterans," interpreted by the Metropolitan Gleemen and seven players of brass and drums from the R. S. L. Band. I found myself, naturally enough, cogitating upon the views of Walt Whitman concerning music, the views of that astonishing, strong-voiced singer of democracy who had heeded so little the traditional notions to verbal music in verse...⁷⁶

The article continues about how Whitman's music lends itself so well to musical setting, but what is clear is that Holst's work had made a strong impact in Perth. Another reflective piece crops up several weeks later discussing Holst's *A Dirge for Two Veterans* by "Minim" in *The Western Mail*. The Gleemen's performance had really highlighted the originality of Holst's work, and after some commentary about Holst's completion of the *Choral Symphony*, the author continued:

Holst is, of course, one of the leaders of the present-day English school of composers. He has won distinction with "The Planets," a series of poems for orchestra, a Falstaffian (sic) opera, "At the Boar's Head," and other works.

The uncommon character of the "Dirge" claims a few words. Holst has set Whitman's poem of the Civil War for male chorus with accompaniment for three cornets, trombone, tuba, bass drum and side drum. The idea of the funeral march dominates the greater part of the work, which is not lacking in impressive work, though the unaccustomed 'modern' harmonies cultivated by the composer are at the first hearing a little strange, even strained in effect. The task of the Gleemen was, in view of the awkward intervals set them, no easy one, and it was hardly to their discredit that there was some uncertainty and lack of assurance in their performance.⁷⁷

The very familiar notion of Holst's musical language being a little strange at first hearing is raised here, even drawing the focus away from the ensemble what this author deemed an uncertain performance lacking in assurance which was largely passed over by the reviews of

⁷⁶ "Whitman and Music," *The West Australian*, October 31, 1925, 15.

⁷⁷ *Western Mail*, November 12, 1925, 21.

the performance. Nevertheless, the audience and critic alike seemed to overcome any ‘strangeness’ of Holst’s compositional language in *Dirge for Two Veterans* and quickly embraced it. The article open with the statement that *of course* Holst was a leader of contemporary English composition. Given the recent success of *The Planets* in the mid-1920s, this can be highlighted as an example of the acclaim his most famous work had brought him.

The second performance of Holst’s *A Dirge for Two Veterans* took place the following year on November 3, 1926, again in Perth. The concert commemorated 25 years of singing in the King’s Theatre, and the choral programme was made up entirely of works of British composers. The review appeared over a week later:

Finally, Gustav Holst’s “Dirge for Two Veterans,” with drums and brass instruments (played by members of the R. S. L. Band) accompanying the choir, stood as a specimen of the more “advanced” school. The Gleemen’s singing was worthy of a notable occasion, and the audience was large.⁷⁸

After the extensive coverage given after the first performance, there was virtually no fanfare here. The critic labelled as “a specimen of the more ‘advanced’ school,” seemingly referring to the dissonant harmonic language used by Holst.⁷⁹

The containment of *A Dirge for Two Veterans* to Western Australia can be seen as a sign of the times – in the 1920s Western Australia was much further away from the forefront of cultural activities in Sydney and Melbourne that it was in later generations. Even with the strongly positive reviews of the performances of Leckie’s Metropolitan Gleemen, the work

⁷⁸ “Music by Minim,” *Western Mail*, November 11, 1926, 37.

⁷⁹ One can almost visualize the author making air-quotes while saying ‘advanced,’ almost undoubtedly loaded with negative connotation for music that was breaking away from traditional harmony.

never translated to the east - strongly hinting that it was Leckie alone who was responsible for the performance.

Two Motets for Unaccompanied Chorus Op. 43 (1925)

Date	Year	State	Singer	Conductor
June 13	1928	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium	Livingstone C. Mote
November 12	1930	VIC	Orpheon Choristers	Leslie Curnow
December 6	1930	VIC	Musical Union	Henry Thomas
September 20	1933	NSW	Sydney Conservatorium	Livingstone C. Mote

Figure 9.13 – Australian Performances of Two Motets for Unaccompanied Chorus

Holst's Two Motets for Unaccompanied Voices op 43 were written in 1925 and published by Faber in Britain. The two motets of op 43 are "The Evening Watch" and "Sing Me the Men," although all four Australian performances found were of the latter. The first performance was given at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music on June 13, 1928, conducted by Livingstone C. Mote. The concert preview gave a good overview of "Sing Me the Men":

Unique interest will attach in Wednesday's concert of the Conservatorium Choir to the first performance here of a new motet for unaccompanied chorus by Gustav Holst, the British composer. This work, "Sing Me the Men," is a setting of verses by Digby Mackworth Dolben, descriptive of the vision of Paradise caught by the eyes of the dying, and Holst's scheme is described as combining the modern manner with a due regard for the mediaeval [sic] character of the text, the music showing many traces of

the influence of plain-song. Holst, in a career of remarkable activity, has revealed in his many part-songs and choruses a certainty and technical proficiency as well as a melodic invention in writing for voices, and doubtless his long experience as a choral conductor has assisted him to this success. The Conservatorium authorities have already made us familiar with his series of orchestral pictures grouped under the title of “The Planets” and his “Rig-Veda” [sic] hymns...⁸⁰

Not only did the author outline the work, but drew attention to the combination of Holst’s “modern manner” mixed with plain-song elements. This almost seems to be a warning for what the public would hear.⁸¹ The overview of Holst’s career – described as a career of remarkable activity – was elaborated upon by reflecting on his other choral and vocal works and their technical and melodic proficiency. It ended by connecting Holst and the Sydney Conservatorium, where many of his works were premiered and performed. The review was found the day after the performance:

“Sing Me the Men,” a motet by Gustav Holst, the British composer, known to Sydney chiefly by “The Planets,” was a feature of the choral concert directed by Mr. Livingstone C. Mote at the Conservatorium last night. The Conservatorium Choir, a well-balanced body of about 50 voices, sang the new work for the most part with commendable judgment and in good vocal quality. The motet is a setting of a text by Digby Mackworth Dolben, who writes of the vision of Paradise in the gaze of dying men, and the title is part of the first line of the poem. The composer has written his score in elevated style, adopting a manner which shows the influence of plain song, and has, moreover, adroitly adapted his melodic line to such unwieldy passages as the “ere this” of the first line and the unpoetical [sic] “Who, to the gate that is” which makes the second line of the text. Mr. Mote led his forces with authority, but the delivery of the

⁸⁰ “New Holst Motet,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 9, 1928, 10.

⁸¹ ‘Be prepared for some ‘interesting’ new sounds mixed with some older ones!’

opening theme for the tenors and basses was rather colourless, and it was not until the full choir took up the theme that the spirit of the motet was fully revealed.

All voices joined at this point in a stirring ensemble, in which the devotional motive of the poem was admirably expressed. At the lines depicting the “steps untrod” of the Heavenly Throne, the composer portrays the awe inspired by the vision of the Redeemer by a series of high ejaculations for the sopranos and altos against the theme carried on by the tenors and basses. The spirit of reverence here was not adequately conveyed by the choir, for the singing was lacking in due expression; but the ensemble at the close was beautifully delivered. The motet is exceedingly interesting, and should be heard again...⁸²

Immediately in this review, the critic had pigeonholed Holst. He was once more ‘the one who wrote *The Planets*,’ but it continued with a mostly positive review of the work and its various features, outlining the places the choir were particularly weak or strong. The summation of the review was resounding: “the motet is exceedingly interesting, and should be heard again.” Whilst this has been proven not to be the case in many other instances, “Sing Me the Men” had three more performances over the next few years.

In a rather gloomy sounding affair, the Orpheon Choristers under Leslie Curnow performed “Sing Me the Men” to an empty Town Hall on November 12, 1930 while, according to the critic, “refusing to be daunted by the depressing conditions.” It was noted that the best singing of the evening was in the “delightfully archaic carol ‘Sing Me the Men’,” and also Cyril Jenkins’ *The Storms Triumph*, while skipping over any further insight into the works or their reception. It was noted, however, that this ensemble had recently won the Ballarat Choral Competition with these two works, however no other evidence could be found about

⁸² “Conservatorium – New Holst Motet,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 14, 1928, 12.

that performance.⁸³ This would indicate that there may have been more performances of the Holst given by the Orpheon Choristers that were not subject to a review.

The next performance of “Sing Me the Men” was given the following month, this time by the Melbourne Choral Union (conducted by Henry Thomas) on December 6. The *Argus* critic - most likely different from the previous review given the expressed views on the work - described the Holst as a “rather pretentious setting of Dolben’s ‘Sing Me the Men’.”⁸⁴ This language and tone is markedly different from the November 14 review, and certainly negative. There was no mention of how the audience received any of the works on the programme, but it certainly no longer seemed the archaic carol described a month earlier.

The second Sydney Conservatorium Choir concert took place on September 20, 1933, which also featured the Sydney premiere of Sibelius’s *En Saga*, presented the last performance found of Holst’s “Sing Me the Men.” After describing the Sibelius, the critic continued:

“Sing Me the Men” was conducted by Mr. Livingstone Mote. The great charm of this unaccompanied choral piece is the way in which it combines lucidity in its total impression with the greatest subtlety, and sometimes much elaboration, in its detail. In the early part the purity of line in unison [sic] passages delights the ear. Later there are some enchanting harmonic interweavings [sic] and transitions. The whole thing was beautifully sung.⁸⁵

It had been five years since the first performance by this ensemble, with largely the same positive result and reflections being achieved. The language was extremely positive, leaving

⁸³ “Artistic Performance at Town Hall,” *The Argus*, November 14, 1930, 10.

⁸⁴ “Three Choirs Concert,” *The Argus*, December 8, 1930, 10.

⁸⁵ “New Work by Sibelius,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 21, 1933, 17.

no doubt that “Sing Me the Men” was effective in its combination of modern harmony and its injection of plainsong influences.⁸⁶

Two Eastern Pictures (1911)

Date	Year	State	Singer	Conductor
June 23	1928	QLD	Lena Hammond's Choir	Lena Hammond
November 30	1929	VIC	Mixed Choirs	Herbert Davis
November 28	1931	NSW	Euterpeans Ladies Choir	Percy Bates
December 19	1931	WA	Aeolian Choir	Doreen Bray

Figure 9.14 – Australian Performances of *Two Eastern Pictures*.

The *Two Eastern Pictures* – “Spring” and “Summer” – received a scattering of performances around Australia. There were four performances across three years in 1928-1931, all of which were given by separate ensembles in different states. The first performance of both of the *Eastern Pictures* in June 1928 was Lena Hammond’s Choir in Queensland’s Albert Hall. The critic held Holst in high regard:

A large audience attended at the Albert Hall on Saturday night to enjoy the work of Miss Lena Hammond’s girls’ and mixed choirs, which organisations, drawn from the ranks of her present pupils, with a stiffening of past students, always are given something interesting to sing and always enter into the spirit of their work with zest. The girls’ choir opened the programme with Mansfield’s “Hunting Song,” and later

⁸⁶ Imogen Holst is critical in her analysis of the harmonic language used in *Sing Me the Men*, stating “it is disconcerting to hear the well-worn consecutive sevenths between the tune and the bass, with layers of consecutive fourths sandwiched between them: this was a device that could be turned on much too easily in moments of exhaustion.” Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 99.

were heard in “Spring” and “Summer” (two Eastern pictures from a poem of Kalidasa set by Gustav Holst). The choir did justice to the fine work of this remarkable choral writer...⁸⁷

Even though the review is brief, there can be no confusion about the standing of Holst’s choral music with his description as remarkable. The performance was noted as good, and the very passing mention of the poet Kalidasa was the only other piece of information relayed. The next performance of the *Two Eastern Pictures* was noted for November 25, 1929, with a preview for a concert found without a follow-up review:

The Orpheon Choristers, under the conductorship of Mr. Herbert Davis, will give a concert next Saturday night at the Assembly Hall, when part songs new to Melbourne will be presented. These include “Choral Songs of England,” by Boughton, and a Cornish Folk song by Holst for mixed choir, “Pastorale,” and “Two Eastern Pictures” (Holst) for women’s voices; and for men’s voices Bantock’s arrangements of old English songs. In addition Holst’s Choral Hymns from the “Rig Veda” [sic] will be repeated.⁸⁸

Herbert Davis was clearly championing not only Holst’s music, but also that of many contemporary British composers. With the works mentioned, Holst could be clearly seen as the centrepiece of this performance with three works on the programme.

The Euterpeans Ladies’ Choir under Percy Bates gave the next rendering of Holst’s *Two Eastern Pictures* on November 28, 1931 in Sydney’s King’s Hall. The critic clearly enjoyed the works, stating:

Amongst the most interesting music of the ladies’ choir were two Eastern tone pictures by Gustav Holst, “Spring” and “Summer.” In these the exotic atmosphere was

⁸⁷ “Choir Concert,” *The Brisbane Courier*, June 25, 1928, 16.

⁸⁸ “Orpheon Choristers,” *The Argus*, November 25, 1929, 10.

heightened by the accompaniment of a tambourine and of humming voices. The audience also gave warm applause to Coleridge Taylor's "Green Heart of the Waters" and the popular "Londonderry Air."⁸⁹

The audience can be assumed as receiving the *Two Eastern Pictures* very positively, with the critic noting that they 'also gave warm applause' after discussing the Holst works.

The Aeolian Choir, conducted by Doreen Bray, gave a concert at the Rest Room⁹⁰ of the Methodist Mission in Perth on December 19, 1931. There were no details given of the event except a list of works, and that the choir sang well.⁹¹

Miscellaneous Other Works

The remaining scattering of Holst's choral and vocal works are discussed below, and include the ever-popular *I Vow to Thee, My Country*, *Ave Maria*, *Hecuba's Lament*, and *A Choral Fantasia*. These will be discussed chronologically, beginning with the 1926 performance of *Autumn Song*.

⁸⁹ "Interesting Singing," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 30, 1931, 5.

⁹⁰ Not to be confused with a washroom!

⁹¹ "Social Notes," *The West Australian*, December 22, 1931, 5.

Date	Year	State	Piece	Group	Conductor
May 4	1926	VIC	Autumn Song	Oriana Madrigal Society	W. C. Frazier
November 17	1926	VIC	Bring Us In Good Ale	Odeon Society	Frank Robertson
July 3	1928	QLD	Unknown	Competition Set Piece	Unspecified
June 5	1929	VIC	Hecuba's Lament	Cecilia Choir	Unspecified
August 21	1929	WA	Ave Maria	Ladies Odeon Society	N.E. Moran
October 6	1929	WA	Ave Maria	Combined Choirs	Unspecified
December 23	1934	WA	A Choral Fantasia	Wesley Methodist Church	

Figure 9.15 – Australian Performances of Miscellaneous Choral Works.

Autumn Song

The Oriana Madrigal Society performed Holst's *Autumn Song* on May 4, 1926 under the direction of W.C. Frazier. The review discussed the reputation of the society and provided insight into Holst's work:

In the short period of four years the Oriana Madrigal Society has earned for itself an enviable reputation. At its concert one can count on hearing really first rate music sung with notable efficiency and a great deal of finesse. The programme presented last night in the Auditorium before a very large audience was no exception, and there were some fine moments, as well as a general high level, in the work of the choir. A modern part song, Gustav Holst's "Autumn Song" (a setting of a poem by William Morris) was full of character, and showed the singers in a very favourable light. Between the second

and third lines of the last verse the society's highly expert conductor (Mr. W. C. Frazier) obtained a vividness of effect of an electrifying kind...⁹²

The Oriana Madrigal Society was noted as having earned its reputation, and Frazier's skill as "highly expert" as its conductor. Holst's song was noted to be in places "electrifying" and full of character, and the language of the critic conveyed that it must be quality music, by indicating that the society only put on 'first rate music.' While the critic made no specific reference to how the audience received the work, all the signs pointed to a positive reception by the large audience in attendance.

Bring Us in Good Ale

The Victorian Postal Institute choir performed Holst's *Bring Us in Good Ale* in a Victorian concert shared with Raymond Ellis. The concert was given at the Auditorium in Melbourne on November 17, 1926, with the very curt review stating:

The Victorian Postal Institute Choir was heard in Rossini's "Inflammatus" ... an arrangement of the somewhat over popular "Volga Boat Song." Morley's "Fire, Fire, My Heart" and Holst's "Bring Us in Good Ale" were characterised by some rather hard tone...⁹³

There is very little to be taken away from this review, except that the critic found the singing lacking. Given the texture and call-and-response style of both the Holst and Morley (which both call for a lightness and rapidity in execution), the hard tone described by the critic would

⁹² "Oriana Madrigal Society," *The Argus*, May 5, 1926, 28.

⁹³ "Raymond Ellis Concert," *The Argus*, November 18, 1926, 5.

work against the effectiveness and intention of both works. Whether or not this hard tone was due to under-preparedness, or simply the direction given to the choir is unknown.

Competition Work

Holst was included in a list of British names containing Ireland, Bridge, Elgar, Delius, Stanford, Bax, Scott, Coleridge Taylor, Purcell, Ronald, and Bantock, from which an “art song” was required to be sung.⁹⁴ This “art song” requirement certainly seemed to be more accurately described as “British song” given the selection of composers allowed. No specific works were named, and there was no more information uncovered about the competition.

Ave Maria

Reviews of two performances of Holst’s *Ave Maria* were found in Western Australia in August and October 1929. The Ladies Odeon Society performed the work in Perth on August 21, 1929. There was a review given for this concert, and also an article that was much more general in discussing other concerts. The first review stated:

Charming in every respect was the treatment of the two-part setting, by Mabel Williams, of “My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose,” sung unaccompanied by 14 members of the society, and then came, in contrast, a double chorus, of eight parts, the work

⁹⁴ “Australian Singing Championship,” *The Brisbane Courier*, July 4, 1928, 7.

being Gustav Holst's setting of the "Ave Maria" hymn. This, too, was unaccompanied. No suggestion was in it of the Holst of works such as "The Planets," or the Rig Veda Hymns, and one would surmise that this somewhat formal work breathing a chaste, statue-like calm in its measures unfolding, dates from early in the composer's career. It was extremely well sung, with perfect clarity and the large audience obtained an encore.⁹⁵

This review discussed how Holst's *Ave Maria* setting was very well received by the large audience, who received an encore (presumably of the same work, although this is not specified). The critic here also took the *Ave Maria* and compared it to Holst's famous works, concluding that it must be a very early work in Holst's career (indeed it was – written in 1900, with Holst barely out of his student life at the Royal College of Music). Here again, then, was an example of anything heard by Holst being compared to his most famous work. A brief discussion by "minim" on August 29 followed:

Both choirs showed enterprise in their selection of works and present-day English composers were well represented. The Odeon Society introduced us to a setting of the "Ave Maria" for double chorus, by Holst...⁹⁶

This review does little but outline that it was at least the Western Australian premier of the *Ave Maria* setting by Holst, although with no other materials found on the work, there is every indication that this was in fact the Australian premier of the work.

The second performance discovered of the *Ave Maria* setting of Holst was given as part of the large Centenary celebrations on October 6. The review depicted an almost unprecedented attendance:

⁹⁵ "Ladies Odeon Society," *The West Australian*, August 22, 1929, 21.

⁹⁶ "Music Platform and Gramophone," *Western Mail*, August 29, 1929, 7.

The Centenary concert of choral and orchestral music yesterday afternoon in Hoyts Regent Theatre was held in circumstances probably unprecedented in the state's musical history. If it has happened in Perth before that so large a building failed, at a music-making by exclusively local talent, to hold all seeking admission, it was certainly very long ago. Yesterday the doors of the big theatre had eventually to be closed, and a crowd of people were to be seen outside as late as 3:30, half an hour after the commencement...

In Holst's unaccompanied "Ave Maria," for double chorus, the Odeon Society was especially impressive, the soft clear tones of the women's voices floating up and dying away in some lovely pianissimos...⁹⁷

Here again in this review the *Ave Maria* received a positive review. It seemed this early Holst – which it must be said is comparatively 'safe' and 'pleasant' sounding, harmonically speaking, compared to some of his later output - appealed to most listeners. The circumstances of the centenary celebrations and the scene that was set for this concert were quite extraordinary, noted by the critic. There was certainly a large audience that heard the concert, and presumably enjoyed the Holst setting, as did the critic. A second review found in a different newspaper echoed the same points.⁹⁸

Hecuba's Lament

Holst's *Hecuba's Lament* was one of Holst's 'experiments' in setting scenes from Greek tragedies.⁹⁹ Scored for alto solo, chorus of female voices and orchestra, the work was written

⁹⁷ "Centenary Concert – Crowds Turned Away," *The West Australian*, October 7, 1929, 20.

⁹⁸ "Centenary Concert – Three Societies Combine," *The Daily News*, October 7, 1929, 10.

⁹⁹ Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 36.

in 1911, and published a decade later in London.¹⁰⁰ The Cecilia Choir in Melbourne performed *Hecuba's Lament* on June 5, 1929, in the Assembly Hall. There was no detail revealed in the review about the audience reception or any elaboration on Holst's work, which in itself is strange given that this may have been the Australian premiere of the work, and that there was orchestral accompaniment and an also a soloist that would usually have drawn at least some comments.¹⁰¹

Choral Fantasia

Holst's *Choral Fantasia* was composed in 1930 – “one of the best years for composing that Holst had ever known.”¹⁰² It was a setting from Robert Bridges ‘Ode to Music,’ and written for the Three Choirs Festival. The *Choral Fantasia* on Christmas carols was performed in a service at the Wesley Methodist Church on December 23, 1934. The preview of works given in a church notices section of the newspaper several days before the performance twice listed “A Choral Fantasia on Christmas Carols by Gustav Holst, including the numbers – Good Christian Gentlemen Rejoice, God Rest You Merry Gentlemen, Nowell.”¹⁰³ No review was given, which was to be expected for music in a church service. A British review from the 1931 Three Choirs Festivals had written the work off as a “novelty,” but conceded that it was genuine all the way through.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Gustav Holst, *Hecuba's Lament* from the “Trojan Women” by Euripides (London: Stainer & Bell, 1921).

¹⁰¹ “Cecilia Choir,” *The Argus*, June 7, 1929, 10.

¹⁰² Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst*, 122.

¹⁰³ “General News,” *The West Australian*, December 20, 1934, 23.

“Church Notices,” *The West Australian*, December 22, 1934, 12.

¹⁰⁴ “Three Choirs Festival – An English Choral Fantasia,” *The Times*, September 9, 1931, 10.

Conclusion

It is plain to see (given the sheer length of coverage and number of works discussed in this chapter) that Holst's vocal and choral music was how the composer was primarily reaching audiences across Australia. Whilst the larger orchestral works such as *The Hymn of Jesus* and *The Planets* accounted for the 'serious' output of Holst's compositional canon (at least when being objectified in the context of musical history), his smaller choral and vocal works were Holst's "wheelhouse" compositions – these were what he was most passionate about writing. This was music accessible to the people – those amateur ensembles and performers performing in local community concerts and festivals. Holst was always focussed on practicality in music making, and the choral and vocal works were, for the most part, his canvas for providing his art to the common people in the community he worked with (such as the students at St. Paul's school and Morley college). This attitude was well known to all attached to the composer, however Imogen Holst relayed some specific examples in her biography"

Morley would be the most difficult to leave. Working there among real amateurs had been a constant delight. He used to say: 'We all begin our education by being amateurs, and, in the real sense of the word, we must remain amateurs'... He once wrote to a friend: 'I wonder if you feel with me that music should either be done in a family party or in a church. I feel this more and more – it was Whitsuntide at Thaxted that convinced me first. One loses one's sense of individual personality, and when that happens music begins.'¹⁰⁵

These choral and vocal works discussed in this chapter provide no exception to the recurring story with Holst's performances in Australia through until the 1950's – the vast majority of works are performed and programmed due to a handful of prominent conductors and choral

¹⁰⁵ Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 97.

directors whose mission of producing contemporary British music was the sole reason that Holst's work (and almost definitely that of many other British composers) were heard in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century. There are many instances of a particular ensemble championing a work exclusively under the tenure of a certain conductor, such as the Malvern Choral Society, who under Herbert Davies performed Holst's *Two Psalms* six times of the eleven performances found, and the Oriana Madrigal Society under W. C. Frazier performing some of the *Six Choral Folk-Songs* during the 1920's and 1930's. Some instances demonstrated how an ensemble continued performing a work after the initial conductor moved on, such as Sydney Madrigal Society, who under Arundel Orchard performed some of the *Songs from The Princess* in the first decade of the twentieth century, but after Orchard's departure back to England in 1923 gave another performance under Frederick Mewton. Looking at the performance charts of each work in this chapter simply strengthens the constant and underlying story for so many of Holst's works in Australia – that a handful of champions were responsible for the majority of the performances of Holst's music in the country.

Chapter 10 - Champions

Throughout this examination of the reception of Holst's music in Australia, and the preceding brief comparative study into his British reception, there is a point that stands out time and again: the importance of the work of a select few people in organizing, programming and championing Holst's music. After reading through the performance history of any given work examined in this thesis, a repetition emerges of particular conductors, performers, and ensembles. In the spirit of tracking a migration pattern, it was often the same person or people who appear when examining other Holst works, and noticeably, in other locations. By exploring the background of some of these key people it will be shown how one champion can have such a prominent impact in seeding the work of a contemporary composer into the local community. These performers and conductors emerge as the primary reason Holst's music is performed in Australia, and why – if at all – the works are heard multiple times. The most important of these champions will be discussed in this chapter, and their contribution to the performance and proliferation of Holst's music in Australia will be examined.

By extracting an overall analysis of some of the main champions of Holst's orchestral music from Chapters Three through Chapter Eight of this thesis it is possible to show the concentration of production of Holst's musical works in Australia:

Conductors and Organisers Responsible for Holst Performances in Australia

Name	Works						
	The Planets	The Operas	Hymn of Jesus	St. Pauls Suite	Other Orchestral Works	Choral Works	Total
Arundel Orchard	4			1		2	7
Malcolm Sargent	2	1					3
Joseph Post	2			1	1		4
Edgar Bainton	1		1	1		2	5
Bernard Heinze		1			1		2
E.R.B. Jordan			1		1	2	4
Fritz Hart				1	4		5
Clive Carey		1					1

Figure 10.1 – Primary orchestral conductors and organizers for Holst performances in Australia.

The names in figure 10.1 feature prominently (in several places exclusively) in this thesis in the discussion of the Holst's larger scale works. A brief analysis of the number of performances for which these eight musicians were responsible versus the total number of performances in Australia for some of the works received is revealing:

	The Planets	The Operas	Hymn of Jesus	St. Pauls Suite	Other Orchestral Works
Total Performances	12	2	2	14	13
Accounted for in Fig 10.1	9	2	2	4	7
Percentage % of Total	75%	100%	100%	29%	54%

Figure 10.2 – Comparison of total performances of given works to those given by musicians in figure 10.1.

Performances of *The Planets* Suite, the operas (*Savitri* and *The Perfect Fool*), and *The Hymn of Jesus* – considered to be among Holst's 'major' works in scope and importance - are all but entirely accounted for by the handful of musicians in figure 10.1. The lower percentage of performances accounted for by this key group in *St. Paul's Suite* can be explained given that the work is scored for string orchestra – these major conductors of the leading orchestras and institutional directors were less likely to be directly involved in the smaller scale performances (which also accounts for many works discussed under the "other orchestral works" heading). An overview of the lives and activities of some of these great musicians will show a catalogue of seminal moments in Australian music history – as well as revealing the opportunities

that these musicians seized to use their influence to champion British music in Australia.

W. Arundel Orchard

Arundel Orchard (Holst's elder by 7 years), witnessed Holst's rise from a viewpoint of maturity. W. Arundel Orchard had a long association with Australia, beginning in 1896 when he relocated in Perth, Western Australia, directing the choir of St George's Cathedral. After this time in Perth, Orchard relocated to Hobart taking on the responsibilities as organist and choirmaster at St. David's Cathedral, as well as conducting the Hobart Philharmonic Society.¹ After a short trip back to England, Orchard was based in Sydney, where he was involved with the Sydney Liedertafel, Sydney Madrigal and Chamber Music Society. The period between 1908-1915 were to be prolific and happy for Orchard, and also included the first concerts of what would become the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, as well the steps leading up to the opening of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.²

The following period was even more impressive for Orchard, who orchestrated the rise of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and its orchestra, as well as achievements in broadcasting performances for the ABC, including the inaugural broadcast in 1932 of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. He was perhaps the most influential

¹ John Carmody, "Orchard, Arundel," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43444> (accessed September 25, 2014).

² Along with Hugh Ward and Alfred Hill, Orchard was responsible for appointing Henri Verbrugghen as the Conservatorium's first Director. Orchard was involved in teaching classes and taking different ensembles until Verbrugghen resigned in 1922, at which time he succeeded the departing Director.

of all the champions in the success and performance of Holst's music in Australia. Under his direction, the Sydney Conservatorium performed *The Planets* in a season-opening concert, which was to be repeated again due to popular demand in the next year's opener. Those and other performances started diffusing Holst's works around the musical community in Australia. Joseph Post had performed in the debut of *The Planets* in 1926, and then took responsibility for the work's performances into the 1930s after Orchard's introduction of the work in Sydney – it was almost a literal passing of the baton in this case.

Sir Malcolm Sargent

Sir Malcolm Sargent was a great promoter not only of Holst's music, but of British music in general wherever he went. Sargent rose to prominence as the result of his involvement with the London, Liverpool, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, as well as the BBC Symphony and top choral societies in Britain.³ His involvement as chief conductor of the British institution *the Proms* secured his reputation as one of the most popular conductors of the day.⁴

Sargent had a broad association with contemporary British composers and was renowned for performing works by Coleridge-Taylor and Vaughan Williams with

³ Ronald Crichton, "Sargent, Sir Malcolm," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/24590> (accessed September 25, 2014).

⁴ Jon Tolansky, "Sargent, Sir Malcolm," *The Oxford Companion to Music. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5894> (accessed September 25, 2014).

ensembles including the Royal Choral Society, who were responsible for the widespread promotion of Coleridge-Taylor's *The Song of Hiawatha* with performances at the Royal Albert Hall.⁵ He conducted the premiere performance of Holst's *At the Boar's Head* on April 3, 1925 with the British National Opera Company as noted previously.

Sargent's promotion of Holst's music in Australia during several trips was important – particularly because his work with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra allowed for the introduction of two important works to the Melbourne public, of compositions which were otherwise only performed in Sydney during the first half of the twentieth century. Sargent performed several movements from *The Planets* during a farewell concert in Melbourne in October 1926, before heading back to England. This happened to be one of the rare performances given outside of Sydney for the suite (or part thereof), which makes it even more significant. Had it not been for this performance, Sydney alone would have been the only platform for this preeminent Holst work. In addition, Sargent performed music from *The Perfect Fool*, which was the only instance of the work having been showcased with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra during a trip in October 1936.

⁵ "Sargent, Malcolm," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e8962> (accessed September 25, 2014).

Edgar Bainton

Edgar Bainton entered the Royal College of Music in 1896 and was there at the same time as Holst, studying with the same teachers.⁶ He was very active in the musical life of communities around England, including involvement as professor of composition and piano at the Conservatoire of Music at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and his conductorship of the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra. After a decade at the Conservatoire, he was appointed its head and expanded the facilities.⁷ It was around this time that Bainton took much from his friend Wilfred Wilson Gibson and was introduced to the circle surrounding the poet Gordon Bottomley. Mixing in these circles, Bainton was influential in the introduction and performance of contemporary British music in the area, including Holst, Vaughan-Williams and Bax.⁸

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Bainton was unlucky enough to have been visiting Bayreuth for its music festival, and was subsequently captured and interned at the Ruhleben camp for the duration of the First World War.⁹ On his return to Newcastle, Bainton resumed his teaching duties and in 1934, the year of Holst's death, he took over as Director of the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music – the foothold for Holst's music in Australia. Bainton went on to conduct the Sydney

⁶ "Bainton, Edgar," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e754> (accessed September 25, 2014).

⁷ David Tunley and Michael Jones, "Bainton, Edgar," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01808> (accessed September 25, 2014).

⁸ Helen Bainton, "Bainton, Edgar Leslie," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bainton-edgar-leslie-5101/text8521> (accessed online 30 September 2014).

⁹ Ruhleben camp was a civilian detention camp located 10km west of Berlin. Camp detainees included male citizens of the Allies living, studying, and working or on holiday in Germany at the outbreak of the First World War.

Symphony Orchestra as well as many ensembles in Sydney and continued his efforts in performing the works of the contemporary British school, playing a large part in Holst's musical life in Australia. Skilled in constructing programs of interest to the public, Bainton balanced staples of the classical repertoire with contemporary British music: he performed Holst's *Two Psalms* on a programme that included the Brahms *German Requiem* with the Sydney Conservatorium choir and orchestra. He also assembled sixteen soloists for an Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Symphony concert performing Holst's Psalm *Lord, Who has made us for Thine Own*. It can be seen that Edgar Bainton was actively gathering soloists and creating opportunities for contemporary British work to be heard, providing a platform for Holst through the national broadcaster, ensuring that the work was exposed to a broad cross-section of the Australian public.

Looking at the comparatively larger selection of the various choral and vocal works (see the analysis in Chapter 9), again a handful of choral conductors and directors of ensembles emerge as the driving force in the production of Holst's works (with Orchard, Bainton and Jordan included again from figure 10.1):

Name	Choral Works
Herbert Davis	9
W.C. Frazier	5
A.J. Leckie	3
Minnie Bull	3
Livingstone C. Mote	2
Arundel Orchard	2
Edgar Bainton	2
E.R.B. Jordan	2

Figure 10.3 – Conductors and ensemble directors' performances of Holst's choral music

Of the 66 performances of the choral and vocal works found, 17 were soloists performing songs in recitals. This leaves 49 performances of Holst's choral works in the first half of the twentieth century in Australia that have been identified in the course of this research. The summary data reveals that Herbert Davies accounted for just fewer than 20% of all the performances of Holst's choral music found. What is unique about Davis' contribution in the choral sphere is the *number* of works he performed. The common theme across the choral works was a rather specialised and contained performance history of each work – with only one or a small number of ensembles performing a single work. Davis, however, was responsible for programming and performing four individual works in his total of nine performances - the *Two Eastern Pictures*, *Two Psalms*, *Three Festival Choruses*, and the *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*. W.C. Frazier too, in his five performances gave performances of three separate works instead of just repeated performances of a single work as many others had done. Frazier conducted the *Autumn Song*, the *Three Festival Choruses*, and three performances of the *Six Choral Folk-Songs*.

Herbert Nelson Davis was a prominent figure on Melbourne's music scene in the first half of the twentieth century. He occupied the position of organist at many churches in Melbourne between 1918 and 1930, and took over as conductor of the Zelman Memorial Symphony Orchestra from 1933 to 1959.¹⁰ Such was his continuously growing influence and involvement in the musical life of Melbourne that in 1939 the city's newspaper, *The Herald* commented that Davis "bids fair to rival Sir James Barrett as champion holder of presidencies and other leaderships around town."¹¹

¹⁰ Kay Dreyfus, "Davis, Herbert Nelson," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/davis-herbert-nelson-9919/text17563> (accessed July 30, 2014).

¹¹ *The Herald*, June 27, 1939, accessed via Dreyfus, "Davis, Herbert Nelson," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Barrett had an assured professional and public reputation in Melbourne and internationally.

This placed him in the forefront of the musical community, giving an impression of the extent of his leadership and influence. The picture emerges - highlighted by Kay Dreyfus in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* – merely from Davis's Holst performances discussed in this thesis; given that his nine performances involved working with four separate ensembles - The Box Hill Choral Society, the Malvern Choral Society (which he founded and conducted between 1925-54), the Zelman Memorial Orchestra, and the Orpheon Choristers. Dreyfus noted that once Davis took over the Zelman orchestra:

The link thus established between his choirs and a stable, if amateur, orchestral group led to performances of a large repertoire of sacred oratorios and the introduction to Australia of major choral works by such English composers as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and Sir Hubert Parry.¹²

Davis began teaching at the Albert Street Conservatorium in 1937 (renamed the Melba Memorial Conservatorium in 1956) and became that institution's Director from 1955-1963. Davis, like Orchard in Sydney, found himself at the forefront of British contemporary music-making in Victoria and, for Holst's choral music at least, familiarised a city with a composer that in the first half of the twentieth century was a great distance away.¹³

Among other titles he was the honorary secretary of the Australian Red Cross, Assistant Director of Medical Services, Australian Forces', thus securing authority which went far beyond that to which he was entitled by rank or training and was also chair of the National Party branch in Toorak extending his influence into politics. The comparison here suggests that Davis even eclipsed in the public eye at least, someone as influential and prominent as Barrett, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/barrett-sir-james-william-64> (accessed September 30, 2014).

¹² Dreyfus, "Davis, Herbert Nelson," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

¹³ Davis's nine Holst performances alone cement him in this category, but his prolific activities (outlined by Dreyfus) supported other contemporary British composers as well.

If Davis was the most prolific organiser of Holst's choral performances in Australia, the British baritone Clive Carey was a singular champion – mounting one important performance, and one song in recital.¹⁴ Carey was a performer of some repute on the recital and opera scene in Britain in the early twentieth century.¹⁵ He had been a chorister at King's College Cambridge, and Organ Scholar at Clare College in 1901. He studied voice, and, like Holst a mere handful of years earlier, took composition under Charles Villiers Stanford at the Royal College of Music.

As outlined in Chapter 4, Carey was involved in performances of *Savitri* in Britain, both as a singer and producer, and it is this involvement that is the obvious starting point for the Australian story of *Savitri*. Prior to his appointment as Director of Strings at the Elder Conservatorium of Music in South Australia in 1924, Carey was a singing teacher at The Royal College of Music – the institution that was responsible for several performances of *Savitri*.¹⁶ Carey's experience with producing operas, a task that he had been undertaking along with performing in them for years, was largely responsible for mounting the British Music Society's production of *Savitri* in Australia. If it were not for Carey, bringing *Savitri* to life might not have happened in Australia for a long time, if at all. His suggestion to Louise Hanson-Dyer and the British Music Society in Melbourne of a performance of Holst's opera was the catalyst for the successful production that was organised by, and also featured Carey.¹⁷ His influence is again noted when he performed in an Oriana Madrigal

¹⁴ There may have been more Holst performances of songs that did not receive reviews, however only one found with a review.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Forbes, "Carey, Clive," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009500> (accessed September 25, 2014).

¹⁶ "Carey, Clive," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e1840> (accessed September 25, 2014).

¹⁷ As detailed in Chapter 4.

Society concert in Melbourne singing British songs including Holst's *There Was a Tree*.

Unlike the choral works, the various vocal works performed can be likened to a shotgun scattering of individual performances, with much less obvious interconnection between certain performers and any given work. The larger-scale example of Holst's solo-vocal works – the Four Songs for Voice and Violin – did reflect the more common champion theme. However, some of the singers who performed Holst's works were champions on a smaller scale. Of the fourteen Australian performances of the Four Songs, Lorna McKean performed four, Zoe Lenegan three, and Ruth Pierce Jones two. Pierce Jones also performed the Twelve Songs Op. 48 twice. Clearly the Four Songs can be seen as more important and successful (in terms of popularity with audiences at least) and, as with the orchestral works in the same category, the performance history reflects the importance of the few in producing the majority. The scatter of the smaller vocal works reflects the nature of a solo vocal recital – one small song here and there in a British set, depending largely upon the teacher and the institution (whether they might be more progressive in introducing contemporary music, and so on).¹⁸ Indeed, it appears as if the institution had less to do with it than the teacher, who in most cases was either involved in British performances of Holst's work, or a close friend of the composer (in the case of Nellie Melba, Clive Carey, and Fritz Hart).

¹⁸ The vast majority of the smaller scale vocal works examined in Chapter nine illustrate this scatter effect.

Louise Hanson-Dyer and the British Music Society

Perhaps one of Holst's most influential supporters behind the scenes, Louise Hanson-Dyer was a motivated and committed presence on the Australian and international music scene. Her support for contemporary music was unmatched,¹⁹ and certainly had a large impact for composers such as Holst and the performance, awareness, and support of his music not only in Australia but continental Europe as well.²⁰ During her time in Australia, particularly the early 1920s, her patronage of Holst was impressive through her activities with the Victorian arm of the British Music Society. The support was immediate – the inaugural meeting was held at the Dyer residence, at which Holst's *Four Songs for Voice and Violin* was given for the first time in the country. The gathering of Holst scores in Australia was accounted for almost in its entirety by Hanson-Dyer's spending and organization, and collections donated to the Victorian State Library,²¹ The Albert Street Conservatorium library, and the British Music Society collections were the clearest and easiest way the musical community and public (in the case of the Victorian State Library) could access Holst's published scores. Even more personally, Hanson-Dyer introduced Holst's music to the cultural elite in Paris, hosting events in her salon that featured Holst's music (even premiering the Twelve Songs op. 48 to an audience containing the likes of Milhaud, Varèse, Poulenc, Honegger and others). Daniela Kaleva concluded that:

Louise Hanson-Dyer's patronage of Gustav Holst took place in the context of

¹⁹ Daniela Kaleva, "Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer's Patronage of Gustav Holst." *Context: Journal of Music Research*, no. 37 (2012): 77-91.

²⁰ Orhan Memed and Maureen Fortey, "Oiseau-Lyre, L'," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16890> (accessed September 25, 2014).

²¹ Kaleva, "Patronage through Dissemination: Louise Hanson-Dyer's Patronage of Gustav Holst."

her efforts to popularise new British music in Melbourne and Paris. She supported him by disseminating his music in printed formats and facilitating live performances of his works. This is an example of combined individual and assimilationist patronage enabled by a local network of influential musicians in Melbourne and the network of modern British composers to which Holst's friends Fritz B. Hart and W. Gillies Whittaker helped her to gain access. It is clear that her artistic appreciation and moral support, along with the financial support provided by purchasing and hiring of scores, was an important form of financial aid and encouragement for Holst during the latter part of his life, when his popularity was diminishing.

The notion of the 'local network of influential musicians' is clearly shown to be even more significant in the full context of this examination into Holst performances in Australia – indeed the influential British network in New South Wales ultimately proved responsible for championing Holst's music above all others.

It is clearly evident that those with a direct connection to the composer gave the vast majority of the performances of Holst's music in Australia. The supporters of Holst's music initially comprised an inner circle of close friends including Holst's greatest advocate, and also the person who cast the largest shadow over his career and whose writing on Holst held greatest historical significance, Ralph Vaughan-Williams.²² Vaughan Williams wrote extensively on Holst's music for his entire life, both during

²² Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42507> (accessed September 25, 2014).

Holst's lifetime and well after, publishing articles in journals and constantly supporting his younger friend.²³

²³ Vaughan Williams included Holst in many of the essays and talks that were collated in *Vaughan Williams on Music* – including outlining his importance in discussions about British music in general (such as in the chapters titled “Introduction to *English Music*,” and “British choral music and Dvorak’s *Stabat Mater*”), and in direct discussions about his friend (there are five of this nature collected here, most notably “Gustav Holst: A Great Composer”). The fondness that Vaughan Williams had for Holst can be seen in his Howland Medal Lecture, where he focussed attention on Holst, having previously been awarded the same medal, and reflected on what a great composer and friend he was. Vaughan Williams, *Vaughan Williams on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99-100.

Conclusion

The key research questions addressed in this work were concerned with how Holst's music was received in Australia and whether it paralleled the reception of his music in Britain. It was hoped that this study would reveal insights into the formation of musical taste in Australia and the musical influences shaping the cultural environment. This led to the formation of the question: 'How could arguably a figurehead of British composition in the first half of the twentieth century, be at the same time overlooked or a 'forgotten man' of British musical history?' In an attempt to find answers and provide stepping-stones for future Holst scholars, consideration was given to how that proposition was either supported or denied by scholars in the musicology field.

Having charted the locations and performers responsible for bringing Holst's work to life in each chapter of this thesis, it became apparent that there were well-defined footholds or epicentres of activity around the country. The most notable location of which was the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. It is no coincidence that Holst performances emerged after the arrival of close friend and contemporary-British musical advocate W. Arundel Orchard. Orchard was to programme and conduct a series of performances of the orchestral suite, as well as mounting many of Holst's larger orchestral and choral works over the next decade. The baton firmly passed from Arundel Orchard to Edgar Bainton in 1934 after Holst's death, to similarly minded admirer and ardent British music promoter.

Examining the overall picture of Gustav Holst's musical reception in Australia illuminates the struggle of the contemporary composer, shown in earlier chapters to

be a battle against unwilling “conventional” ears, the performance vacuum created by the Great War and the reliance on individual champions to determine whether the work was heard or remained hidden from the concert-going public. Holst, while enjoying some good performance runs in the 1920s and 1930s in Britain, was never really cemented as a composer of note with the concert-going public nor programmed as regularly as some of his contemporaries (the constant comparison, Vaughan Williams for example). Rather Holst was the ‘composer’s composer’ – commanding much respect from fellow musicians and composers of the day. The filmmaker Tony Palmer, when discussing the inception of his 2011 documentary on Holst recalled:

It was 40 years ago, while filming Benjamin Britten, that I first thought of making a film about Gustav Holst. I had noticed a photograph of the young Holst in Britten's music room, and asked him why. He told me, "I owe him more than I can tell you." Which was odd, because you almost never heard the name of Holst mentioned among of the pantheon of the 20th century's great composers.²⁴

Even if the history books did not reflect as much, the mountain of evidence provided in the narrative of contemporary press has shown that Holst and his music had made a dramatic impact on the musical landscape of Britain in the early twentieth century.

In analysing each of Holst’s major works, almost without exception a pattern emerges among performances of the works. Holst performances were much like an earthquake – there was an epicentre of a work’s premiere, and after the initial performance the

²⁴ Tony Palmer, “The inner orbit of Gustav Holst,” *The Guardian*, April 21, 2011 (accessed online October 4, 2014).

secondary aftershocks are found - rarely far from the site of the original performance. Much has been said internationally about Holst's most popular work, *The Planets*; however having examined the work from the viewpoint of its Australian reception, it was found that the suite gained its foothold within the walls of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1926 thanks to W. Arundel Orchard. The work was very well received, and was subsequently repeated as the following year's season opener for the Conservatorium Orchestra. After these performances - and their great reception by the musical public, the work just faded away quietly. It was not heard again until the mid-1930s when Joseph Post conducted the Australian Broadcasting Commission Orchestra in Victoria and used several movements in a concert. Given Post was involved as a performer in the 1926 Sydney debut of the work, he subsequently included it in his repertoire as he developed as a conductor, taking on the role of a champion for Holst.

There were other small pockets of performances that clearly originated and travelled with a particular performer or ensemble. The Four Songs for Voice and Violin are a prime example, with the violinist Vaughan Hanley performing the work with several singers in New South Wales, and then appearing in many performances in Western Australia years later. Hanley clearly took the work with him to the West when relocating to Perth in the 1930s.

Two types of champions of Holst's music in Australia have been clearly shown through the analysis of his major works. There were the *prolific champions* – Arundel Orchard and Herbert Davis – who were clearly responsible for the greatest volume of performances in Sydney and Melbourne - and in a less performance-

oriented but equally important light, Louise Hanson-Dyer, with her British Music Society organisational support and personal patronage of performances and other vital avenues important to a composer, including purchasing Holst's music for her library in Australia. There were also the *concentrated champions* – such as Malcolm Sargent, E.R.B. Jordan, and Clive Carey – who, even if just for one performance of a work, were solely responsible for its introduction to the country. A pivotal finding in this thesis is that overall, however, W. Arundel Orchard's influence at the helm of the Sydney Conservatorium of music made it the foothold for Holst's music in Australia. Orchard was among the strongest supporters of Holst's music and cause, and the flow-on effect that came from the performances and personnel of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music was, far and away, the most important factor in Holst's musical performances in Australia at the broadest level.

Considering the evidence in earlier chapters and compiling this analysis of the performances of Holst's music in Australia, the evidence clearly illustrates the struggle for a contemporary composer in the early twentieth-century. Without his champions, the majority of Holst's music would not have been heard at all in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century, at least not as soon after their initial performances in Britain. If the British musicians, notably personal friends and supporters of Holst's music had not been at the helm of Australia's major musical training institutions between 1920-1950, it is difficult to even speculate about where and how the vast majority of his works would have been performed, if at all. The only exceptions could have been *The Planets* and *St. Paul's Suite*, which may have received performances in major population centres due to their overwhelming audience appeal.

Gustav Holst was a historically overlooked member of the British composition school of the early twentieth century. The historiographical accounts during Holst's lifetime and further into the century told a dramatically different story to that of the press notices surrounding his performances and general opinion relayed in media of the day. Holst was consistently lauded in reviews as being of seminal importance in British nationalistic composition, with *Savitri* and *The Perfect Fool*, *The Planets*, and *The Hymn of Jesus* among his key contributions. Yet this regrettably never translated to the written historical accounts of the music of this period, which instead focussed attention on Vaughan Williams, and Elgar before him. Holst was always disregarded in the historiographical portrait that remains of British music in the twentieth century, often grouped as an afterthought to Vaughan Williams or overlooked entirely; his compositional language and output was deemed too experimental and undesirable (which, as the many reviews and reflection on his works from the press and the public have shown, was not the case). Regardless of the subjective enjoyment of Holst's compositional language, conclusions could be drawn from the mountain of from the historiographical accounts. The portrait of Gustav Holst's importance to British musical history has been painted unflatteringly and unfairly. His background and working-class life (in the eyes of British social mores of the time), was in stark contrast to that of the background of Vaughan Williams – the statelier, 'noble' artist of the period – which should be seen as an important factor in the way Holst was represented, or indeed not represented. This may seem innocuous, but considering how musicians in the twenty-first century view Holst – the dramatic segregation of opinion between Holst admirers and many musicians who merely know Holst as 'the composer who wrote *The Planets*' – the damage done by Holst's historiographical

portrait becomes apparent. This investigation sheds a positive light on Holst's work and standing bolstered by the views of key supporters and the Australian musical public, and it is the hope that this work contributes to redress this imbalance by prompting further lines of scholarly enquiry into the reception and work of this important composer.

If nobody likes your work, you have to go on just for the sake of the work. And you're in no danger of letting the public make you repeat yourself. Every artist ought to pray that he may not be 'a success'. If he's a failure he stands a good chance of concentrating upon the best work of which he's capable.²⁵



²⁵ Holst's remarks to Clifford Bax, reported in Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 81.

Appendix 1

Richard Greene's analysis of reviews for *The Planets*

Richard Greene, *Holst: The Planets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
34-35

1	27 February 1919 (London) (Ma, Me, Sa, Ur, Ju)				
2	22 November 1919 (London) (Ve, Me, Ju)				
3	10 October 1920 (Birmingham) (Ma, Ve, Me, Sa, Ju)				
4	15 November 1920 (London) (première of full suite)				
P = Positive review; N = Negative review; M = Mixed; O = Neutral; PP = Extremely positive review; NN = Extremely negative review; x/x = two reviews or preview/review					
Periodical/Newspaper	1	2	3	4	
<i>Arts Gazette</i>	P	P			
<i>Athenaeum</i>				P	
<i>Birmingham Gazette & Express</i>			P		
<i>Birmingham Mail</i>			P		
<i>Birmingham News</i>			O		
<i>Birmingham Post</i>			N		
<i>Daily Chronicle</i>	P	O			
<i>Daily Express</i>	P				
<i>Daily Herald</i>		P			
<i>Daily Mail</i>		M	P	P/PP	
<i>Daily News (and Leader)</i>		N		P	
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>		P		PP	
<i>Evening News</i>	O				
<i>Evening Standard (and St. James Gazette)</i>		O		O	
<i>The Globe</i>	N			N	
<i>Ladies' Field</i>		M			
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	M		M	P/P	
<i>Monthly Musical Record</i>				PP	
<i>Morning Post</i>	P				
<i>Musical Opinion</i>			P		
<i>Musical Standard</i>			N		
<i>Musical Times</i>	O				
<i>The Observer</i>		N		O/P#	
<i>The Outlook</i>				PP	
<i>Pall Mall Gazette</i>	P	P			
<i>Queen</i>				P	
<i>The Referee</i>	N/M*				
<i>Sackbut</i>				NN	
<i>Saturday Review</i>	N	N		P	
<i>The Star</i>	P				
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	N			PP	
<i>Sunday Evening Telegram</i>	P				
<i>The Times</i>	N/P+	P		M	
<i>Truth</i>				NN	
<i>Westminster Dispatch</i>	N				
<i>Westminster Gazette</i>	P				
<i>Yorkshire Post</i>	M*				

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